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THE GREAT PROBLEM:

CAN IT BE SOLVED?





# THE GREAT PROBLEM:

CAN IT BE SOLVED?

BY

G. R. GLEIG, M.A.


PREBENDARY OF ST PAUL'S

LATE CHAPLAIN-GENERAL TO HER MAJESTY'S FORCES

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

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## P R E F A C E.

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THIS book is not intended for the use of men and women strong in the faith, as from childhood it has been presented to them, but for the benefit of persons so shaken by modern criticism upon points once held to be unassailable, that they find themselves drifting, in many instances against their will, into a state of mind which is neither belief nor unbelief, but pitiable perplexity.

My object in writing has been to make plain to these waverers that the doubts and fears to which they give themselves over are as baseless as they are unmanly. For to what, after all, do the difficulties raised by modern criticism amount? Science, it appears, has proved to demonstration that the world is much older than divines represent it to be; and that man, so far from being a distinct act of creation, is nothing more than the most perfect development, as yet discovered, of the protoplasm, or common germ

of life. As to the Bible, it is described as coming forth so changed from the crucible of modern scholarship, that to treat it with greater respect than we pay to the sacred books of other religions is no longer possible. Hence the miracles which it records, and "the scheme of redemption" which ingenious theologians have ingrafted upon them, inasmuch as they outrage alike physical and moral truth, so they must equally be discarded. Who, then, can answer the question, "Are we any longer Christians?" otherwise than in negative, or, at the best, in dubious terms?

Now, supposing all this to be sound philosophy—in which case we must suppose a good deal—is there anything in it calculated to bring about a radical change in the views which, up to the present moment, we Christians have entertained of the relation in which we stand towards the Author of our being? It may create in us some mistrust—I do not say that it ought to do so—in the dogmatic teaching of Churches, and in systems of theology. But neither with the dogmatic teaching of any Church, nor with any system of theology, is Christianity so identified, that hesitation to subscribe absolutely to the former, or absolutely to adopt the latter, shall leave us no choice except to deny Christ, and make common cause with unbelievers. What Christianity really is, both in its essence and in its object, must be ascertained, not by



consulting the decrees of councils, or the writings of uninspired men, however eminent, but by a careful study of the sayings and doings of its Divine Founder; and he who applies himself to that study in a spirit honest, humble, and teachable, need be under no apprehension but that he will rise from his task a wiser, because a more thoroughly believing man, than he was when he first set about it.

Into the questions of the world's age and the antiquity and origin of man I have not considered it necessary to enter at all. Settle these as you may, your decision cannot affect, one way or another, either the lessons taught by universal history or the inferences which we are justified in drawing from them. The case is different when we come to deal with miracles in general, and on that subject I have not hesitated to speak plainly. Only an atomic philosopher, for whom there is no living God, will assert that, in the nature of things, they are impossible; yet I cannot think that any Christian advocate would in these days rest his argument, as Leslie and Watson did a century ago, on a literal acceptance of what is told in the Book of Genesis respecting the plagues of Egypt or the passage of the Red Sea. On the other hand, I can discover no ground on which to anticipate, either for myself or others, a state of conscious existence in a world beyond the grave if my faith in

the resurrection of my Lord be shaken. In speaking of that great miracle, I have therefore stated at length the considerations which induce me to believe that no reasonable doubt ought to be entertained in regard to it; and it follows, as a matter of course, that where there is faith enough to believe that one such suspension of the ordinary laws of nature did take place, there can be no hesitation in crediting others, provided always the circumstances under which they are represented to have occurred appear, for reasons equally cogent, to demand our assent to them.

With respect to the "scheme of redemption," I have endeavoured to show that the objections raised to it are forcible only so far as the subject is misunderstood or has been misrepresented. In like manner as regards the dogmatic teaching of Churches, as it is nothing more than the concurrent view of Christian doctrine taken by men who in ages past found themselves called upon to combat errors of which the prevalence would have swamped Christianity altogether, so we, for whom Gnosticism and Neoplatonism have no terrors, are perfectly free, while we treat them with the utmost respect, to go back to the fountain-head, and there drink in full draughts of Gospel truth where it is purest. On that head, also, I have therefore ventured to express myself frankly—though not more so, let me hope, than is becoming



in one who, having lived a long life in strict communion with the Church of England, intends, God willing, to die in the same.

It may be said, perhaps, that in deferring so much to the scruples or prejudices of the sceptic, I have gone further than was necessary in the way of concession, and injured thereby the cause which I seek to support. But such is not my own opinion. I believe, on the contrary, that when to the doubter everything is granted which, with any show of reason, he can demand, genuine Christianity, so far from sustaining hurt, will but the more commend itself to the acceptance both of the scholar and the peasant. For, as has been well said by Principal Tulloch in his admirable Sermon for the Times,\* “Let the age of the earth be what it may (we shall be very grateful to the British Association, or any other association, when it has settled for us how old the earth is, and how long man has been upon the face of it); let man spring in his physical system from some lower phase of life; let the Bible be resolved into its constituent sources by the power of modern analysis, and our views of it greatly change, as indeed they are rapidly changing,—all this does not change or destroy in one iota the spiritual life that throbs at the heart of humanity, and that witnesses to a spiritual life above. No

\* Religion and Theology : A Sermon for the Times.

science, truly so called, can ever touch this or destroy it, for the simple reason that its work is outside the spiritual or religious sphere altogether. Scientific presumption may suggest the delusiveness of this sphere, just as in former times religious presumption sought to restrain the inquiries of science. It may, when it becomes ribald with a fanaticism far worse than any fanaticism of religion, assail and ridicule the hopes which, amidst much weakness, have made men noble for more than eighteen Christian centuries. But science has no voice beyond its own province. The weakest and the simplest soul, strong in the consciousness of the divine within and above it, may withstand its most powerful assaults." And let me add, that on minds stored with knowledge and made vigorous by inward reflection, the only effect produced will be a mingled feeling of surprise and regret that a use so unworthy should be made of gifts in themselves so precious.

It was my original intention to have published this work as a series of papers in 'Blackwood's Magazine.' Indeed, the essay which now forms the opening chapter appeared in that able periodical so long ago as January 1875. But it pleased God to visit me almost immediately afterwards with a severe illness, which long incapacitated me for mental labour, and has left me very much dependent—as, indeed, at eighty years

of age most men, especially with impaired vision, must expect to be—on the tender affection of others for the supply both of my mental and bodily wants. Under these circumstances, and advised by my friend and publisher, I have judged it better to launch the volume in its present shape, than to gather up with difficulty the threads of an interrupted discussion, which the readers of ‘Blackwood’ might fail to catch when offered to them.

I am not conscious of having made use of other men’s ideas without acknowledging the obligations under which they laid me, or of intentionally misrepresenting either the motives or the proceedings of those from whom I differ; but I do not consider it necessary to present to my readers a long list of names as vouchers, so to speak, for the fact that I have read, as well as thought, a good deal upon the subject here brought under their notice. I must, however, both in justice to him and to myself, make special mention of Professor Max Müller, whose works have been to me not instructive only, but consolatory, because they go further in teaching me how to read ancient thought, expressed through ancient language, than those of any other writer with whom I am acquainted. If I seem to have borrowed too much from him, especially in my third chapter, I trust he will forgive the wrong.



And now, a parting word to all who may honour these pages by perusing them. He who, like myself, finds himself standing on the narrowest portion of the ledge which separates time from eternity, can have no object in writing as I have done, except an earnest desire to promote the truth. Nothing could be more easy than, in terms of unmeasured censure, to condemn all who refuse or are unable to believe as the Church teaches. But I cannot see that good would arise from following such a course, because the evidence which on any disputed point satisfies me, may fail to satisfy my brother; and belief on one hand or unbelief on the other is not now a question to be settled by authority. The Problem which I offer for solution, and towards the solution of which I endeavour to shadow forth the outlines of a way, amounts to this: Cannot all who are conscious of their responsibility to a higher power—who look forward to a future life which, for good or for evil, shall take its colouring from the present—who find in Christianity “the one thing necessary for humanity,” “a religion based upon purity of heart and the brotherhood of man,”—agree to keep their differences so far in the background as that the young and comparatively uninstructed may not be driven, through sheer inability to decide among them, into just such an Epicurean indifference as made ancient Rome what

she was under the first of the Cæsars? You follow Christ because you regard Him as the most perfect moral teacher the world has ever seen. I follow Him likewise, because I believe that He was a teacher sent from God. You say that because He gave to the world "the true religion," He merited the divine rank that has been conceded to Him. I say that His nature was divine, and that in rendering to Him divine honours, we give to Him only what is due. Why should you, who feel as acutely as I, that in proportion as Christianity becomes the rule of life to man, man's happiness will be promoted, go out of your way to create doubts in minds which, being trained to connect certain metaphysical postulates with moral truth, will certainly not abandon the one without abandoning the other also? Our mistake, if it be one, can injure nobody. Yours, if you be in error, must lead to disastrous consequences; because, however capable you may be, in the plenitude of your intellectual strength, of following, without faith, the dictates of "the true religion," you cannot expect that the multitude, with whom faith and religion are convertible terms, will exercise the smallest self-restraint in order to evince their respect for the latter after you shall have convinced them that the former is a delusion.

On the other hand, I would venture to suggest to

preachers and advocates of Christianity, that if they insist less than some of them do upon dogma, and more upon religion, they will approach nearer to the style of their Divine Master's teaching, and more effectually promote the establishment of His kingdom upon earth. For what are the constitutions of Churches, vestments, postures, and all the pomp and ceremonial of public worship? nay, what are confessions of faith and sacraments themselves, except means towards the attainment of an end? Make men understand that they most resemble Christ who feel most keenly their need of Christ,—who yearn to be partakers of His loving, compassionate, holy nature,—who, sensible of their own weakness, turn to Him for strength,—while, through good and evil, they labour to do their duty in the station of life, whatever it may be, into which it shall please God to call them;—make men feel and understand all this, and act up to it, and you will have done the work which was given you to do, and done it well. Even thus you may fail to carry along with you persons so mentally constituted that they can admit nothing to be real or true which lies outside the region of sense or the limits of mathematical demonstration. But, at least, Christianity will cease to be presented to them as a religion beset not with intellectual difficulties only, which are indeed inseparable from everything which has reference to



the Divine—but with moral difficulties from which there is no escape, except in the irrational assumption that justice and mercy mean one thing when applied to man, and quite a different thing when applied to God.

G. R. G.

DEANE HOUSE, *May* 1876.



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# THE GREAT PROBLEM:

CAN IT BE SOLVED?



## CHAPTER I.

OBJECT OF THE WORK—GENERAL ADMISSION OF THE MORAL EXCELLENCE OF CHRISTIANITY—MIRACLES—REASONS WHY THEY NEED NOT BE REGARDED AS IMPOSSIBLE—THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY FULL OF DIFFICULTIES—BUT NOT MORE SO THAN THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL—THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST THE SOLE EVIDENCE OF A FUTURE LIFE TO MAN.

It would be idle to shut our eyes to the fact, that in all the countries of Europe, and nowhere more strikingly so than in our own, a change has passed, or is passing, over the minds of the educated classes, especially among the young, on the most important of all subjects. Old religious beliefs appear to be losing their hold on men's convictions, and nothing is brought forward to supply their place which seems capable of filling the void left thereby in the human heart. This is owing, no doubt, in part, at least, to

the misuse that has been made of the discoveries of modern science. We find that the crust of the earth is older by countless ages than the assumed date of the Mosaic cosmogony; we discover traces of the existence of man long anterior to the period which chronology has fixed for the creation of Adam; we have satisfied ourselves that Nature works by laws which are regular, uniform, and immutable;—and we ask—some of us in fear and trembling, others with a presumption which is perhaps as much affected as real—“What confidence can any longer be placed in the story which the Old Testament tells?” Nor is the simpler narrative of the New Testament, interwoven though it be with the most perfect moral system the world has ever seen, left unchallenged. Christ is indeed accepted by modern rationalists as a real personage. His identity is no longer disputed. But we seem anxious to bring Him down to the level of a highly-gifted man, whose claim to be considered, in any sense of the term, the Son of God, must be treated as the merest delusion. So be it. The cause of truth, or of what we are still old-fashioned enough to regard as truth, gains a good deal even from this meagre admission. If Christ really lived and taught as the New Testament represents Him to have done, there must be something in the Old Testament story which is not altogether fabulous. For He undoubtedly connects Himself and His fortunes very inti-



mately with the leading incidents therein recorded ; and we but stultify ourselves if we speak of Him as at once the most perfect moralist that ever lived, and as one who founded his whole ethical system upon a lie.

It is not, however, to the misuse of the discoveries which have been made by modern science that we are disposed to attribute exclusively the hesitating temper into which, on religious questions, modern society has fallen. The misfortune—for a terrible misfortune it is—may be traced back quite as much to the dogged obstinacy of worn-out orthodoxy as to other causes. If our religious teachers insist still upon our accepting as literally true everything that is written in the Old Testament—if they will not allow us to apply to what is called sacred history, the same canon of criticism which we apply freely to profane history—and, above all, if, having invented a theological system of their own, and pronounced it to be from God, they cut us off from the pale of Christianity unless we cordially accept and unfeignedly believe it all,—then is their dogmatism at least as much responsible for the state of uneasiness into which thoughtful persons are falling, as are either the flippant objections of Strauss and the philosophers of his school, or the more dangerous, because far more guarded, infidelity of Rénan, his followers and abettors. Nor, to confess the truth, does the position of the believer appear to us to be

materially improved by the line of argument, if argument it deserve to be called, which Dr Farrar has taken up. In his interesting, and in many respects valuable, 'Life of Christ,' he looks at the magnificent subject of his tale through one medium only. Christ is to him a hero, whose career he traces, just as he would trace that of Socrates or Alexander, relying absolutely for every statement which he advances upon the authority of the four Evangelists, and making no attempt whatever to explain the nature and main object of Christ's mission, or to show when and by what means it was accomplished. We look upon this as a great defect in the work, which is the more to be regretted, because, in his preface, Dr Farrar gives proof that he is perfectly aware of the need of some such introduction to his wondrous story, and of his own competency to supply it. Let us not, however, be ungrateful for what we have got. "Writing as a believer to believers, as a Christian to Christians," Dr Farrar has produced a narrative which is read now, and will continue to be read, with pleasure and profit in many a Christian household. His style may be somewhat too flowery for his subject—fastidious persons may even say that he has diluted by unnecessarily expanding a tale which can never be made more impressive than as it is told in the pages of the New Testament. But he has done a good work notwithstanding—though it may not

be altogether suited to meet what is the crying want of the age.

Of 'Ecce Homo' it is too late in the day to speak either in praise or disparagement. The book has taken its place, and will long retain it, in English literature. And more than this. In spite of the somewhat extravagant eulogiums which it drew from Mr Gladstone on the one hand, and the carping criticism to which it was subjected by writers of inferior note on the other, it deserves to be regarded as perhaps the most effective tribute that has anywhere been paid to the ethics of Christianity. No mean achievement this for any author to have accomplished. For though we cannot say with the poet,—

“For forms of faith let senseless bigots fight,  
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right,”

we accept with reverence the dictum of a far higher authority: “He that doeth the will of my Father, will know of my doctrine whether it be true.”

Like 'Ecce Homo,' M. Rénan's 'Vie de Jesus' has long passed out of the province of literary criticism. It has made its mark upon public opinion for good or for evil; and with persons capable of separating the wheat from the chaff in argument, scarcely more, we are inclined to think, for evil than for good. Admittedly it is the production of one who professes entire disbelief in revelation, and makes somewhat free with the historical authorities from which he

quotes. But its general tone, when its author reasons, is sober ; and when he pursues his narrative, it is grave and reverential. M. Rénan is no atomic or materialistic philosopher—he is too wise for that. He recognises in creation the handiwork of an intelligent and beneficent creator ; and of Jesus, and of the religion which He founded, he speaks in terms of unqualified respect : “ By that [His perfect ethics] he [Jesus] founded as upon a rock the true religion ; and if religion be the one thing necessary for humanity, by that act he merited the divine rank which has been conceded to him. An idea altogether novel—that of a religion based upon purity of heart, and the brotherhood of man, won its way through him into the world—an idea so lofty that the Christian Church, using it well, can have no difficulty in making his purposes plain, but which in our day only a few spirits seem capable of realising in its simplicity.” It is thus that M. Rénan speaks of the religion of Christ as it came pure from the hands of its author. Of Christ Himself he says : “ His glory does not consist in taking a place apart from history. We render to him honour more true when we show that without him universal history would be incomprehensible.”

It appears to us that such admissions as these go a great way towards helping the timid and the wavering out of the difficulties in which they find themselves immersed. Here we have the representatives



of three antagonistic schools of thought agreeing in two most important points. The child-like believer, the philosopher who professes neither Christian belief nor its opposite, the open and avowed infidel, equally pronounce primitive Christianity to be the true religion ; and all agree that Jesus, by whom it was given to mankind, is the one figure round which universal history gathers. What is there to prevent them from coming to a similar agreement on two other points—*i.e.*, that a religion so perfect must have emanated from God alone, and that its founder stood, and could not but stand, in such relation towards the Creator and Governor of the universe, as no other being ever stood of whom history makes mention ? And if they meet here, why should they hesitate to go a little farther and inquire together amicably and in a candid spirit, whether or no the story which the Bible tells be not, after all, in every essential particular, worthy of universal credence ?

Impossible, it will be said ; because the story of the Bible is stuffed full of miracles and prodigies ; and of miracles and prodigies no philosopher can admit the reality. And if this difficulty could be overcome, there is in the Christian scheme, as Churches and divines expound it, so much that is derogatory to God's honour, and offensive to man's common sense of justice, that no sober-minded and impartial person can look at it except with aversion.

We have already spoken somewhat freely of that worn-out theological system, which revolts not pure theists only, but all thoughtful Christians likewise ; and we shall endeavour hereafter to show, that as it is without any solid foundation in the teaching of Holy Scripture, so it need not stand in the way of the sort of inquiry which we venture to recommend, and from which we are sanguine enough to anticipate that good may come. It may be well, however, before entering upon this discussion, to notice very briefly the preliminary objection of all ; of which we are far from pretending to underrate the importance, though it need not, in our opinion, present an insuperable obstacle either to inquiry or to the attainment of a sober and just conclusion.

The objections to miracles may be summarised thus : First, universal experience is against them ; next, they contradict the well-known and established laws of nature. With respect to the former of these objections, we may observe that its force is rather imaginary than real, for in truth there is no such thing as universal experience. Each man's experience is his own exclusively ; he cannot share it with another. The results of your experience, when offered to me, are testimony, and nothing more ; and I accept them as satisfactory if I have confidence, not in your integrity only, but in your fitness to deal with the subject under consideration. Moreover, if your state-

ments happen to agree with my own experience, I attach additional importance to them ; but we may both of us be in error. The Indian prince who pronounced the European traveller to be a liar, because he said that water became at certain seasons solid in his own country, was justified by reference to his own experience. My father died before the electric telegraph came into play, my grandfather before steam was applied to purposes of locomotion. Had the one been told that it was possible to communicate with America in forty seconds, the other that the journey between London and Edinburgh might be accomplished in twelve hours, would not both of them have pronounced their informant to be a mendacious idiot ? And am I much more reasonable if I affirm dogmatically that because no real miracle has ever been performed within my experience, or the experience of any person with whom I am acquainted, therefore no real miracle has ever been performed since the world began ?

It would appear, then, that the testimony of experience, though of unquestionable weight, is not absolutely conclusive on any disputed point in history. There may have been, in times past, causes at work which operate no longer, but which when in operation produced incidents which we call miraculous. Undoubtedly, also, no such causes may have existed, and therefore no such effects may have been brought

about. But when we find ourselves obliged to balance probabilities or even possibilities, he must be a very inaccurate reasoner indeed who will not admit that the point at issue admits at all events of doubt.

It may be said that reasoning of this sort, however just under ordinary circumstances, becomes mere sophistry when thus applied. This is not an age of ignorance and idle wonder. The laws of nature are familiar to all educated men, and we know them to be uniform and inviolable. But the laws of nature are not opposed to the combinations of forces, or to the results of such combinations however wonderful. The electric wire, for example, and the application of steam to locomotion, might not have been anticipated in the eighteenth or beginning of the nineteenth century. They were, however, just as possible then as they are seen to be now. But who will say as much of the resurrection of a dead man to life, or the blessing of sight bestowed by a word spoken on one born blind? These are effects which no combination of forces could produce. They are interruptions or breaches of the laws of nature, and we are therefore justified in pronouncing them to be impossible.

There seem to us to be two reasons why we should at least hesitate before coming to this conclusion. In the first place, the idea of law or laws necessarily involves the idea of an intelligent lawgiver; and to the intelligent being who gives or makes a law, the



power surely belongs of suspending or altering the law, whenever such suspension or alteration shall appear to be desirable. In the next place, when we speak of nature and the laws of nature, we are prone to contemplate only that portion of the universe of which our senses can take cognisance. But the universe does not consist exclusively of visible and tangible objects. There is a world of mind as well as a world of matter ; nor can it be doubted that the one is just as much subject to law—that is, to the control of the great Lawgiver—as the other. We address ourselves, it will be seen, in this latter proposition, only to those among our readers who accept the former. If there be philosophers in this nineteenth century who really believe that the universe is nothing more than the result of a fortuitous concourse of atoms, with them we cannot argue. Law, without an intelligent lawgiver, is for us just as much an impossibility as it is impossible to take in the idea of creation without a Creator, though we are quite prepared to judge of the character of the Creator by the obvious tendency of the laws by which the universe is governed.

Nobody, we presume, will question the fact, that in the visible world the rule is order—producing, and intended to produce, the greatest possible amount of happiness to sentient beings ; the exception to the rule, disorder, leading to an opposite result. This is

indeed self-evident, because the multiplication of animal life is a multiplication of aggregate enjoyment, even though, in consequence of the arrangement, species prey upon species, and disease and death come, in one shape or another, to all. For disease comes but rarely, and death once for all ; and both, as among the inferior animals they appear never to be anticipated, weigh but as feathers in the scale against the sense of enjoyment that springs from the consciousness of existence. But happiness varies according to the place which creatures made capable of enjoyment and suffering fill in creation. Of the inferior races the vast majority look for nothing, care for nothing, beyond the gratification of their animal instincts. The few which are brought into intimate relationship with man evince the germs of nobler qualities,—of reverence, gratitude, love. But their love, reverence, and gratitude attach them only as individuals to their respective masters ; they never rise as a species ; they are manifestly incapable of rising above the level on which they stood at the beginning. Their condition is therefore as perfect as the place allotted to them in creation will allow. They know nothing of moral good or moral evil ; they fulfil the end of their existence in following the bent of their instincts.

The case is different with man. He has received from the Creator higher gifts—reason, freedom of

will, and that which, in the absence of a more appropriate term, we call the moral sense. His reason, if it were of force enough, at all times and under all circumstances, to control his will, would, we may presume, instruct him where to seek for true happiness ; and under its guidance he might discover that there is as much of wisdom as of philanthropy in the golden rule, which bids each of us do to others as he would they should do to him. His moral sense, likewise, were it always healthy, and in full operation, would restrain him from indulging his own wishes, if in so doing he ran the risk, not only of giving pain to his neighbours, but of bringing evil at some future period on himself. But are these things so in fact ? Universal history answers in the negative. Man, wherever we find him, follows the dictates of his own volitions, and his volitions are acted upon neither by reason nor by the moral sense, but by the motive, whatever it may be, which presents itself in sufficient strength to his will. Hence the necessity of holding society together by laws of which it is the object to restrain one man from seeking his own gain or gratification at the expense of injury to others. Such laws succeed, though in part only, because they deal only with overt acts ; and appealing to personal fear, the basest of all motives, are worthless to form the character, to render it generous and noble and true. But this is not all.

The inability of human laws to attain even the imperfect end at which they aim, is proved by the fact that, in all ages and in every condition of society, an authority superior to their own has been called in to sanction and sustain them. Religion is that authority. You cannot go so far back into history, you cannot visit a country so rude, that religion in some shape or another is not appealed to as sanctioning the laws and customs under which its inhabitants live. The laws may be bad, the customs odious, the religion a degrading superstition; yet there they are, all three side by side, just as they have ever been since the elements of society came together. Is not this, to say the least, a very noticeable fact?

Another fact connected with this part of our subject is not less noteworthy. Wherever the religious principle is comparatively pure, and its requirements are universally respected and generally observed, there the tone of society becomes proportionately elevated throughout. Wherever religion is a thing of forms and ceremonies, of times and of places, pressed for State purposes upon the multitude, and by the governing classes discredited and despised, though it may help the magistrate to assert the supremacy of the law, its effect upon the general condition of society is rather to debase than to elevate.

Apply this reasoning to the subject before us. We have seen that the power which governs the material world governs it by laws, of which it is the tendency to produce among sentient beings the greatest amount of happiness of which they are capable. Surely it is not too much to assume that the laws by which the same being governs the world of mind—in other words, creatures endowed with reason as well as sense—must likewise be such as shall bring within their reach the greatest amount of happiness of which they also are capable. To deny this would be to attribute to the Creator a less measure of benevolence in His dealings with superior, than we predicate of Him in His dealings with inferior, beings. But the happiness of rational beings is advanced, not so much by an adequate supply of their physical wants, as by just such a moral training as, without interfering with the absolute freedom of their will, shall supply them with motives strong enough to create a habitual shrinking from moral evil, and a habitual preference for moral good.

True, it will be said, but in the exercise of right reason, men discover these motives. It may be necessary to restrain the wills of the ignorant and the barbarous by bringing to bear upon them the terrors of superstition. But men enlightened and accustomed to reason on all subjects stand in need of no such restraining influence. Exactly, therefore, as



communities become civilised, virtue is cultivated for its own sake ; and, for analogous though opposite reasons, vice is generally eschewed. Is this assumption borne out by the facts of history ? We think not.

The world was certainly not barbarous nineteen centuries ago. Time and the course of events had raised it far above barbarism. Single families had long grown into tribes ; tribes had long expanded into nations ; and nations, acted upon by war and commerce, had become great and populous empires. One of these, more powerful than the rest, was supreme over large portions of Europe, of Asia, and of Africa. Wherever the arms of Rome were carried, there went with them the civilising influence of Roman literature and Roman arts. In her cities, and especially in her capital, refinement was carried to the extreme of luxury. What monuments remain to command our admiration of the skill of her architects, sculptors, and painters, and of the painters, sculptors, and architects, who had preceded them ! Think of the poets, historians, orators, philosophers, who flourished previously to the Christian era ! How profound are their speculations in every department of thought, how near their approach to truth in many ! Nor must we confine our attention to Rome—and to Greece, Rome's instructress in philosophy and letters. Empires great in arms, in literature, and in arts, had

risen and fallen in the East, long before Western civilisation came in contact with them. What was the moral condition of them all ? St Paul, whatever may be thought of him in other respects, is a trustworthy evidence in this ; and the statements which he advances in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, are more than confirmed by the writings of Juvenal and Perseus among the Latins, and of Lucian among the Greeks. How, indeed, could a community be other than rotten to the core where domestic slavery prevailed in its worst form, where the marriage tie was held in no respect, where the exposure of infants was habitual, and where for the amusement of the multitude men butchered each other in the amphitheatre ? Perhaps the world was never more civilised, using that term in its conventional sense, than in the interval between the accession of Augustus and the reign of Tiberius Cæsar. Certainly it was never more steeped in corruption, which extended through all classes, making rulers venal, subjects base, crimes gigantic, punishments ferocious, destroying in individuals the very sense of shame, and outraging all the laws of decency and decorum.

Looking at the matter in this light—remembering that there was a time when man's intellectual nature had wonderfully expanded itself, while his moral sense was utterly debased—the problem which pre-

sents itself for solution is this : whether is it more consistent with our notions of the wisdom and benevolence of the great First Cause to believe that He would look with indifference at the moral ruin of His intelligent creatures, and suffer it to go on ; or that, as from time to time He adjusts the laws of the material world so as to bring order out of confusion, so He should apply to an evil which could by no other process be arrested, just such a remedy as He is represented to have applied in the New Testament ? For what is the remedy ? No violence whatever is offered to that absolute freedom of will which is inseparable from the nature of man ; but motives are presented to him of sufficient force to outweigh, by the assurance of greater good in the future, the impulses which direct him to grasp at a present good, indifferent to consequences.

But why insist that in order to attain this end miracles were necessary ? We admit that of all the moral teachers whom the world has seen, Jesus is the most perfect. But very much that He taught had been taught before He was born ; and the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments is inculcated by all religions, the most extravagant as well as the most simple.

We admit that the ethics of Plato, of Aristotle, of Zeno, and of Cicero are admirable. We admit, also, that both among Jews and Gentiles the belief in a

future state was by the vulgar generally accepted. But what influence did the ethics of the schools exercise over the moral condition of mankind ? and how many among the educated classes entertained any belief at all in a state of retribution beyond the grave ? The spectacle presented to our gaze at the period of Christ's birth is, as we have seen, that of a world sunk in the lowest depths of moral degradation. Religion and philosophy are alike dissociated from ethics ; and perfection in literature and the arts seems only to give fresh zest to pursuits which brutalise. What takes place ? At the very moment when this deplorable state of things has reached a climax, there appears in one of the most despised provinces of the empire one who gives out that he has been commissioned by God to reveal, not to his own countrymen only, but to every people under the sun, the true nature and will of the Supreme Being, and the duty which they owe to Him and to one another. But his mission goes further than this. What the loftiest intellects that preceded him guessed at, hoped for, and misunderstood, he positively and authoritatively affirms. With him a future life is no subject of speculation ; it is a great reality : and in that future life all the inequalities which in the present perplex the wise and offend the good are to be made even. The individual in question sets about his task, the most gigantic that was ever undertaken upon

earth, unsustained by any of the advantages which usually enable ambitious men to achieve or even to attempt revolutions. His birth is humble; he is poor—so poor that at times he hath not where to lay his head. His adherents are a little band of persons, scarcely raised, if raised at all, above the condition of peasants. The chief scene of his labours is the obscure district of Galilee, with occasional inroads into Judea, and visits paid at rare intervals to Samaria, and the hamlets and villages that touch the borders of Tyre and Sidon. There he undertakes, by his own teaching, and with the co-operation of twelve fishermen, to change the whole current of human thought, not alone in his native country, nor yet throughout the Roman empire, but all over the world. The enemies of Christianity themselves admit that he succeeded. For though, so far as regards numbers, the professors of the religion of Christ be still in a marked minority when compared with the professors of some other religions, the influence of Christianity is felt, and felt for good, to the utmost limits of the earth. Is this the work of God, or of man? Could it have been devised, far less carried into effect, through the mere exercise of human ingenuity?

But the marvel does not end here. The author of this new religion, the founder of this new school of thought, is arrested in mid career and put to death. His religion, his philosophy, call it which you will,



so far from dying with him, gains fresh vigour from the catastrophe. They who had been his companions in life declare that he is risen from the dead ; that they had themselves seen him, conversed with him, handled him ; that they were commissioned by him to take up the work of the world's regeneration where he had laid it down ; and they take it up, and push it forward boldly. They make no secret all the while of the recompense which is in store for themselves and their disciples. In this world they must encounter shame, scorn, alienation from kindred, torture, death. The crowns reserved for them are in that future world, to impress on the minds of all whom they approach a settled faith in the reality of which is the one great end for which they live and labour. That a work of such stupendous magnitude, so begun and so pushed forward, should have come to a successful issue, may surely be described as in itself a miracle of miracles. We see in it, not civilisation prevailing gradually over barbarism, not wisdom shedding its light by little and little over ignorance, but the ignorance of this world literally and truly giving the law to its wisdom—the mean things of the earth acquiring a mastery over the great. Enthusiasm in a cause which men believe to be right will, no doubt, go a great way towards insuring success. But enthusiasm which is not sustained by something from without more powerful than itself—by

military force, for example, or political force, or such moral force as superior social and intellectual station supplies—never carries those who are guided by it beyond very limited triumphs. The founder of Mormonism succeeded in erecting one small state or community, which is already falling to pieces. The Agapemone embraced a single family establishment, and never went further. Mohammed, on the other hand, spread his religion far and wide by the sword ; and the partial success of the Reformation in Europe was not achieved without war. Of the origin of Buddhism, and other ancient creeds, it is difficult to speak, because history is for them lost in tradition ; yet, as far as we are able to trace them to their sources, they one and all received their first impulse not less from the political influence than from the superior knowledge of their founders. But Christianity, which took its rise from poverty, lowly station, and the comparative absence of all that men usually regard as learning and genius, has in eighteen centuries succeeded in establishing a wondrous influence over the whole world of human thought. If this be the result of human reason, unaided by something higher, it is of human reason acting in direct opposition to the teaching of experience and the common order of things.

All this may be admitted—indeed it is historically true ; but why, we shall be asked, insist upon believ-

ing the tale of the resurrection? If you speak to us of the immortality of the soul, we can take in and assent to your reasoning. But that soul and body once separated should ever come together again is for obvious reasons impossible. We know that the body which we commit to the earth or to the ocean decomposes, supplying nutriment to herbs and grasses, and through them to other animals, and among the rest to man. We know, also, that the matter of the universe, however frequently it may change its forms, has neither increased nor diminished since the universe began. How can it be alleged, in the face of facts like these, that the atoms of which any special body was composed, can ever be brought together again? You say that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and with St Paul you rest upon that fact your belief that all who now live and die—that all who have ever lived and died—that all who may live and die to the end—shall in like manner rise from the dead. But you scarcely do justice to your great authority, whose argument cuts both ways. In one sentence St Paul affirms positively enough, "Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that sleep." In another he inverts the proposition and says, "If the dead rise not, then is Christ not risen." This is very like reasoning in a circle, especially when we recollect that the resurrection of Christ, if it took place at all, took place within six-and-thirty hours

after death—a space of time scarcely sufficient to admit of the beginning of that decomposition which, in the case of men dying a thousand or even a hundred years ago, has dispersed the atoms of which their bodies were composed to the four winds. Is it not, therefore, more judicious to believe that they who vouched for the resurrection of Christ were themselves mistaken, than to build upon their assertion a doctrine so extravagant as that on which the whole Christian scheme is supposed to hinge?

We admit the difficulty—the enormous difficulty—of the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead. Treated as popular theology treats it, the subject will not bear a moment's grave consideration. But is the doctrine of the immortality of the soul one whit more intelligible? What is that thing which we call the soul? Is there such a thing? Has it, at the present moment, an entity distinct from the body? Can we form any conception of the means by which consciousness of existence could be retained by it, were the link which connects it with the body severed? Constituted as we are, we know, or fancy that we know, how to solve the mystery of our being. We see with our eyes, we hear with our ears, we taste, we touch, we smell. By the exercise of one act of volition we lie down, by the exercise of another we rise up; and we explain all this by saying that the same mind which receives impressions through the organs of

sense, directs, by what we call its acts of volition, the body now to labour, now to rest. But what the mind is which receives these impressions, and exercises this power over the body—whether it be really anything distinct from the physical frame, and, if distinct, where it resides ?—these are problems which have never yet been solved, nor, as far as we can see, are ever likely to be solved by the exercise of human reason. And if the difficulty be thus insurmountable of arriving at a clear conception of the mode of the soul's existence now, how much more above our comprehension is the idea of the soul's active existence in a state separate from the body !

In expressing ourselves thus, we are not, be it observed, arguing against either the immateriality or the immortality of the soul. We firmly believe in both ; not because we hold the one to be the necessary result of the other, but because the one is made clear to us by our own consciousness, and the other rests upon faith, having its root in sure testimony. But what we do not understand—and we defy the most ingenious of philosophers to explain it to us—is this : How could the immaterial being which I call my soul exercise any of the powers that are inherent in it, if it were deprived of the organs or tools with which it now works, or of organs or tools of a kindred nature ?

Lord Brougham, in his introduction to Paley's



Natural Theology, has gone as far as man can go to meet this difficulty. He says, and says truly, that mind is just as much the subject of investigation or experiment as matter. He dwells much upon the evidence of consciousness, which identifies the full-grown man with the infant—on the mind's capability of exercising itself in mathematical calculations, in recalling events past, in forecasting the future—on dreams, as affording evidence that the mind never ceases to work, and that it can work just as well without the bodily organs as with them. And from all this he draws the inference that, being immaterial, the soul is indestructible, and therefore necessarily immortal. But does not Lord Brougham's reasoning rest altogether upon a fallacy? Dreams come to us only in the brief interval which immediately precedes either our falling into deep sleep, or our awakening from it. In sleep, if it be healthy and sound, all consciousness is suspended. Undoubtedly there is suspension of consciousness in a swoon; and the patient who is under the influence of chloroform knows nothing of the preparations that are made for operating upon him, or of the operation till it is performed. As to the power of the mind to exercise itself in mathematical calculations, in recalling events past, and in forecasting the future, is it not entirely dependent on the healthy state of the brain? Puncture one cell in that delicate organ, or let an apoplec-

tic shock fall upon the thinker, and where are his calculations, his memories, or his prognostications ? On the other hand, consciousness testifies to the fact, that animal life is not, and cannot be, the mere effect of organisation. I who write these lines in extreme old age am conscious that, though every atom of my physical frame has been changed over and over again, I am the same being who, seven decades and a half ago, walked hand in hand with my nurse or my mother, and learned from both to express my wants in articulate sounds. But my consciousness teaches me much more than this. It testifies to the fact that the growth of my mind in vigour and capacity kept pace with the growth of my body ; and if I live long enough for my body to become thoroughly crippled, others will see, though I myself be unconscious of it, that my mind "jangles out of tune."

The fact that the mind strengthens with the body's strength, and decays with the body's natural decay, admits of no question. Men struck down by fatal accident or acute disease, often retain their faculties to the last ; but of all who pass their threescore and ten or fourscore years, how minute is the proportion who fail to fall into a second childhood !

"From Marlborough's eyes the streams of dotage flow,  
And Swift expires, a driveller and a show."

But this admitted fact supplies no argument against either the immateriality or the immortality

of the soul. All that it proves—and this we think it proves to demonstration—is that the immaterial soul can no more without physical organs of some kind exercise the powers that belong to it, and not to the material body, than the watchmaker—in whom the power absolutely dwells—can make a watch if you deprive him of his tools.

Believing all this to be true, we seem to have no other alternative than to believe also that the soul, being immortal, must, on its severance from the material body, either become absorbed in the soul of the universe, and thus lose all consciousness of separate existence, or find itself “clothed upon” by another body, which the apostle speaks of as a “spiritual body.” The former was the belief entertained by the most profound thinkers in the various theistic schools of Greek philosophy. We need scarcely add that it is the cardinal article in the creed of Buddhists and Brahmins of the present day. The latter is clearly and distinctly what is taught by Christianity. The former had no influence, and could have none, as a motive of action in human affairs. The latter holds constantly before men’s eyes the prospect of a future life, which shall be to each individual a separate and distinct existence, linked to that which now is by the same chain of consciousness which assures the full-grown man that he is identical with the schoolboy. Nor is it any objection to this

theory to urge, that such a state as we here imagine would be the result of a new creation. Why should it ? Our material bodies have entirely passed from us over and over again since we were born, yet our consciousness of identity has never been broken. Why should death, of which the effect appears to be to achieve in a moment what in life was brought about by degrees, destroy this identity ? If "the spiritual body" which we anticipate be not evolved at once, then consciousness is suspended. But consciousness has been repeatedly suspended in us all when we swooned, and when we slept the sleep of health. Why shrink from the contemplation of a more prolonged suspension—if consciousness be again suspended at the hour of death ? Sleep, when it is deep and sound, takes no note of time ; and when the process of "clothing upon" takes place, the interval between the loss and the recovery of consciousness will seem to each resuscitated soul to have been but momentary.

But it will be said, the resurrection of Christ, as it is set forth in the New Testament, was the resuscitation of the same body which the disciples laid in the grave. It was tangible, for they handled it ; it was a human body restored to life, for it ate in their presence. Is this credible ?

Why should it be incredible ? If the body of Christ risen was visible and tangible, it was so

entirely at His own discretion. He is described as appearing and disappearing at pleasure — now in Galilee, now in Jerusalem. Doors bolted for fear of the Jews can neither exclude nor retain Him. The change, in fact, which at death passes unobserved over the physical condition of others, passed perceptibly over His. “Sown in corruption, His body rose in incorruption ; sown in dishonour, it rose in glory ; sown a natural body, it rose a spiritual body.” And for this there was a reason. The shadowy appearance to the survivors of one known to be dead, may startle and solemnise for the moment. Most of us, indeed, can vouch for the effect of such appearances in our dreams ; some of us can even speak of them as visible in our hours of waking, but not healthy, consciousness. What then ? The impression, however vivid, soon passes away. We awake, and lo ! it was a dream ; or we regain our vigour of mind and body, and recognise the delusion. Now, the Christian holds that it was the great purpose of this one exercise of Divine power so to stamp its impression on the minds of those who were subjected to it, that neither time nor tide, nor difficulties nor dangers, should ever suffice to weaken, much less to blot it out. The condition of the tomb when visited by Peter and John—the renewed intercourse, by fits and starts, of the risen Lord with His disciples—His submitting the spiritual body to the test of their



senses,—all these things were necessary in order to convince them that they were not labouring under any hallucination ; but that He Himself, whom they had followed in His humiliation and to the death, was indeed alive again, and become the first-fruits of them that sleep. It appears then, that, accepting the postulate that for a great moral purpose the reality of a future state must be brought home to the convictions of mankind, there is not only nothing in the evidence afforded to that fact in the New Testament with which a reasonable man ought to be offended, but that any other mode of bringing the fact home to the conviction of all classes—the high, the low, the educated, the uneducated, the civilised, the savage, the full-grown man and the child alike—it passes the most lively imagination to conceive.

## CHAPTER II.

HISTORIC MAN EVERYWHERE A RELIGIOUS BEING—HOW THE PHENOMENON IS ACCOUNTED FOR—THE ATOMIC THEORY—THE INSTINCTIVE THEORY—THE POSITIVIST THEORY—THE THEORY OF A PRIMITIVE REVELATION—REASONS FOR NOT TREATING IT AS VISIONARY—MAX MÜLLER'S VIEWS—NOT ALTOGETHER CLEAR.

ALLUSION was made in the previous chapter to an incident in man's moral existence, to account for which in such a manner as to satisfy even his own scruples appears to be the hardest task to which the philosopher can apply himself. Wherever he has been found in ages past, wherever he is found still, man is a religious being—except in cases so rare, and at the same time so peculiar, that they complicate rather than lessen the difficulty of assigning an adequate cause for the phenomenon. His conception of what religion is may be more reasonable here—less reasonable there—as regards both the object of his worship and the obligations under which he is laid by it; but a belief that a power exists external to himself, invisible yet always near him, to which he must look for the supply of his necessities, and the failure to propi-

tiate which may involve him in the gravest difficulties—this belief, with the active results arising out of it, seems to be universal wherever the elements of human society are to be found. Among savages so degraded as the aboriginal inhabitants of Australia are represented to have been, recognising no bond of connection between individuals more advanced than the family tie, scarce a trace, we are assured, of the religious sentiment could be found; and in the wild boy discovered early in last century alone amid the forests of Russia, we know that it was entirely wanting. But cases of this sort, exceptional in the strictest sense of the word, so far from helping us to solve the problem, appear rather to put the possible solution farther from us, inasmuch as they throw a fresh obstacle in the way of our concurrence in a theory which, if carelessly looked at, or expressed in terms of doubtful meaning, appears to be as satisfactory as it is simple. It is obvious, however, that unless we can succeed in obtaining something like a foothold at this, the preliminary stage in our inquiry, all hope must be abandoned of reaching common ground, whereon thinkers of antagonistic schools may meet to compare and soften down, if they be unable absolutely to compose, their differences. We propose, therefore, before proceeding further, to state briefly but fairly the more prominent of the views that have been entertained on the subject, and to give, as

clearly as we can, the reasons which operate to guide our own judgment in choosing among them.

With philosophers of the atomic school we have already declined, and must again decline, to enter into controversy. He who can bring himself to think of man as nothing more than an animated organism, put together without design, and dissolved by the same chemical forces which dissolve other organisms, lives in a world so entirely apart from ours that fair discussion between us is impossible. For him, the religious sentiment has of course no solid foundation on which to rest. He sees it everywhere in active operation round about him, yet pronounces it to be a delusion and a snare, invented by the crafty for the purpose of establishing dominion over the simple, and only not exploded long ago because the majority of civilised men are still too crass to embrace the truths which natural science has revealed. Does it not occur to him that his theory fails to meet the question raised by the easy process of evading it? We do not at the present moment ask whether the universal belief, of which he cannot deny the existence, be belief in a reality or in a sham. What we want to know is, how it originated. Now it is no answer to this question to say that it was invented by the crafty few for the purpose of establishing their authority over the simple many. Whence did the crafty few draw the inspira-

tion which suggested to their minds, if they had minds, the image of a power invisible yet always near, of which they could speak to the simple many as if it were a reality ? Religion may be a bugbear and a delusion, but it certainly has to do with ideas a great deal too sublime, even in its rudest form, to be elaborated for a purpose by untutored intellects. And no truth can be better established than that there never was a time when to historic man religion was a thing unknown. We dismiss, therefore, the materialistic theory as baseless and self-contradictory, that we may seek elsewhere for an answer to the question, How is the undoubted fact to be accounted for, that in every condition of society man seems always to have been, as he still continues to be, a religious being ?

The simplest and apparently the most obvious way out of the difficulty, is to assume that man is intuitively or instinctively religious ; in other words, that being gifted with reason, it comes as naturally to him to transcend the finite and approach the infinite, as to recognise the force and obey the impulse of any other act of volition. The objections to this theory are, however, so many and so grave, that to us, at least, there seems to be no possibility of threading our way through them. In the first place, powers or faculties which are instinctive in a species are also operative in every individual in the species.



Now, in Peter the wild boy (he was, by the way, a man of middle age when first reclaimed from his forest life) not the faintest recognition of an invisible power external to himself could be discovered, and scarcely to the end of his days was it found possible to awaken it within him. In like manner, the natives of New South Wales whom the first European settlers encountered practised no form of worship whatever, nor had in their language a word expressive of God. And if the account of the recent recovery of a French lad from one of their tribes may be relied upon, such of them as still wander about in their savage independence remain in the same condition. On this ground alone we must regard the intuitive or instinctive theory as inadmissible. But there are other objections to it quite as obvious, and even more cogent. Instincts never lead astray. They impel the hungry to eat, not to drink; the thirsty to drink, not to eat. They are, besides, far more acute and perfect in man uncivilised than in civilised man. Accept the instinctive theory, and it will follow that we ought to look for the truest conception of the Divine nature and attributes, not among civilised men, but among savages; and that, except when civilisation has blunted their instincts, men's conceptions of the Divine nature and attributes ought everywhere to be the same. But we know

that in both cases fact is entirely opposed to theory. Almost all the superstitions of uncivilised man outrage our conceptions of the Divine nature and attributes. Reduced to practice, they tend only to degrade and brutalise humanity ; and certainly in their details they differ as widely, one from the other, as the complexions of men born under a temperate climate differ from those of men born between the tropics or within the arctic circle.

It appears, then, that the instinctive theory, though less outrageous and absurd than the atomic, cannot be sustained.

Of the views entertained by the Positivists, judging from the terms in which their great master, Comte, expresses himself, it is not very easy to speak with confidence. If we do them wrong, we pray them to forgive the involuntary error ; but they seem to us to believe in a religion which recognises no distinct object of worship, but only some vague and general sense of duty, without any power at all in the human intellect to transcend the finite and approach the divine. Any attempt to deal with such a view of things in connection with the subject now before us would be ridiculous, if it were possible ; but it is not possible. Within some little clique of imaginative and highly-educated men, ideas such as these may be treated as realities ; but as they certainly had no

existence in the infancy of the world, so they cannot possibly be brought to bear upon the difficulty we are now seeking to remove.

There is a strong prejudice among philosophers—not necessarily nor on that account to be treated as sceptics—against a third theory which remains to be noticed ; and perhaps the circumstance is scarcely to be wondered at. If you ask an orthodox Churchman why men believe in God, he will reply, Because God has been revealed to them in the Bible ; and if you further ask why he believes the Bible, his answer will be, Because it is the Word of God. Such an argument as this—if argument it deserve to be called—carries its own refutation on the face of it. But there are other and better reasons why the thoughtful man should pause before pronouncing the idea of a primitive revelation to be visionary. Without questioning the reader's right to dispute their validity, we will state just as many of these reasons as present themselves with the greatest force to our own minds.

It is a well-established truth in history that barbarous tribes never civilise themselves ; that the seeds of knowledge and refinement invariably come to them from without, and germinate or stagnate, or perish altogether, according not more to the quality of the seeds themselves than to the aptitude of those among whom they are sown. The same rule holds good in natural history. In order to effect an improvement in the

quality of herbs and breeds of cattle, an influence more potent than is exercised by unassisted nature must be brought into play ; and the application of such influence, if it be applied judiciously, never fails of producing the desired result. The rose which you gather in the garden of a skilful horticulturist is a very different flower from the rose in its natural state ; and beside the winner of the Derby, the finest Arab in the stud of the Shah of Persia or the Khedive of Egypt would cut but a sorry figure. Nor is it exclusively in calling into existence improved—we might almost have said new—physical properties, both in the plant and the animal, that the law of which we are speaking asserts its supremacy. The effects of moral training in animal life, through the influence exercised by the superior over the inferior intelligence, are to the full as conspicuous and still more astonishing. The dog in his natural state is just as much a wild beast as the wolf. Their instincts are equally acute, and with a certain amount of forethought both appear to be gifted ; for it is the practice of each to hide away what he cannot consume of the meal that is before him, in order that he may have wherewithal to satisfy hunger when it assails him again. But further than this, the power of generalisation does not go with either ; and of the moral sense they are alike destitute. The dog in his natural state has just as little perception as the wolf of any

other principle or motive of action than the appetite which immediately presses him. How different is his condition after he has been domesticated with man ! Then faculties are called into play, of the very germs of which he appears in his state of nature to be destitute. The contact of a superior with his inferior intelligence may do nothing to sharpen his instincts—perhaps it operates in a contrary direction ; but he becomes, under its guidance, a moral agent, accepting his master's will as the rule of his own life, and evidently conscious of satisfaction or the reverse, according to the success or failure of his endeavours to act up to it. All this is shown in his most expressive countenance, which beams with pleasure as often as he earns his master's approval, and is overshadowed with mortification when his master is angry with him. But this is not all. The habit of self-control which the dog acquires from personal contact with man abides with him in situations where no human eye is upon him. Of this phenomenon we have all had experience in the conduct of the sheep-dog, which will sit for hours under the hedge beside the shepherd's dinner, yet refrain from eating a morsel till his master returns to share it with him. Moreover, it is a mistake to suppose, as we are prone to do, that the moral elevation thus attained is perceptible only in the individual dog. No truth in natural history can be better vouched for than this, that the descendants



of dogs which have been trained by man inherit the moral qualities for which their parents were remarkable; that they are more docile than dogs of the same breed, in the direction which the training of their parents had taken; and that two or more generations must have returned to a state of nature ere the effects of the moral culture of which we are speaking cease to be observable.

The natural intelligence of man is superior to that of the dog, because the Creator has endowed him, not with instinct only, but with reason. Had this higher faculty been withheld from him, man, instead of establishing a dominion over the other works of creation, would have been the most helpless of animated beings. Indeed it is difficult to conceive how he could have continued to exist at all; for he is destitute of the natural covering which shields other animals from the inclemency of the weather, and is neither swift enough of foot to escape from beasts of prey, nor capable, with the weapons with which nature has supplied him, of defending himself against them when attacked. But here reason comes in to compensate, and much more than compensate, for all these deficiencies. It teaches him how to fabricate weapons of offence—how to extract fire from the friction of two pieces of wood—how to twist the tough tendrils into a snare wherewith to catch the prey which might otherwise escape from him—how to

shelter himself under the wigwam from the heat of the sun by day, and from the dews that fall by night. Thus furnished, he is more than a match for the fiercest of the beasts that prowl the forest. These, equally with the antelope and the gazelle, fall beneath the stroke of his arrows ; and the furs which used to render them indifferent to the pelting of the storm become his clothing.

Such is man in his rudest state, as compared with other beings which share with him the inestimable blessing of conscious existence. Feebler in his physical frame than many, and in his instincts less acute than most, he yet from the outset exercises dominion over all. But still more marked, as time rolls on, becomes the contrast between them. The brute, guided by instinct, goes to his point, whatever it may be, with a precision and regularity unknown to man. He lives his day, propagates his kind, and leaves his descendants to tread the same unvarying round which he trod before them. Man, on the contrary, because he is a rational creature, not only appropriates whatever arts his fathers may have acquired, but enlarges and improves upon them. At this point, however, the capabilities of unaided reason cease—for reason can deal only with things that are cognisable. The entire world of visible nature is the field of labour on which to exercise its powers; and as invention follows invention, and discovery follows discovery, civilisa-

tion goes forward. But the moment you approach the confines of abstract speculation, you become aware that reason is at fault. We need not, in confirmation of this statement, refer to the writings of the ancients. Every man who has attempted to solve the mystery of his own being must be aware of the hopeless confusion into which his thoughts immediately run. He finds nothing tangible to lay hold of—no fixed premises from which to start—no certain conclusion at which to arrive, except perhaps this, that some guide more safe than reason must go before, otherwise there is for him no escape out of the labyrinth in which he has lost himself. Nor is this all. The progress of civilisation, however largely it may multiply man's physical and intellectual wants, and the means of supplying them, does little, if it stand alone, to increase the amount of his aggregate happiness. The Roman world was certainly not more free from suffering in the reign of Tiberius than it used to be in the days of the early republic. Wiser it had doubtless become in many respects—infinately more conversant with the secrets of nature, and in the most polished circles of society keenly alive to the fact that neither boundless power, nor exhaustless wealth, nor the fullest enjoyment of the pleasures of sense, nor all combined, can satisfy the yearnings of the human soul. But happier no man will pronounce the community at large to have been who reads history,

and is satisfied that the tale which history tells is essentially true.

With these well-established facts before us, and with the further knowledge that over the earth's surface "there is neither speech nor language" but proclaims man's dependence upon and responsibility to the power which created him, it appears to us that, in endeavouring to account for the phenomenon, we have only one or other of two alternatives between which to choose. Either we must regard the religious principle as instinctive in man—a conclusion which, for reasons stated elsewhere, we hold to be impossible; or we must accept the theory, old-fashioned as it is pronounced to be, that the first principles of true religion were communicated to the parents of the human race by a process which we call revelation. How this process was carried on—whether by face-to-face converse between man and the visible embodiment of a higher intelligence, or by the involuntary stirring within his own mind of thoughts unconnected with the material objects which surrounded him—we have no means of determining; for even the account given in the Book of Genesis of the beginnings of things throws no light whatever upon the subject. One thing, however, appears to be certain, that only by the impact of some force exterior to itself could an intellect so untutored as that of primeval man be made to take in the idea of a being

actively existent yet intangible—everywhere present yet nowhere to be seen—and to recognise his own moral obligation to render worship and obedience to the will of this wondrous abstraction.

No, we shall be told ; the view which you take of this matter is too restricted. There is still another process by which, setting aside the theories both of instinct and revelation, man would arrive very early at a knowledge of the one great truth on which religion and its obligations are founded. The first use which he might be expected to make of the faculty of reason wherewith the Creator had endowed him would be to ask whence he came ; what brought him into existence : and though the primary ideas of God and of his own duty might be gross and material, as indeed they could not well be anything else, time and the growth of his own intelligence would enable him by degrees to correct them. Now, in the first place, is it true that man's original ideas of God were gross and material ? And secondly, are we taught by history that these ideas became less gross as civilisation advanced ? There is ample evidence to prove that both assumptions are erroneous. Man's primary idea of the Great Being to whom he owed his existence seems to have been marvellously pure and simple. It was only after his condition had changed, and civilisation made at least some progress, that this idea became debased.



To such as are at once desirous of seeing their way through the present to the past, and are capable of distinguishing between clear reasoning and a strange inaptitude to grasp one of the most important issues to which it leads, we recommend a careful study of Professor Max Müller's lectures on the Science of Religion. Bringing to his subject a more perfect acquaintance with language in all its varieties than is possessed perhaps by any other living scholar, he proves to demonstration that the superstitions of India, of ancient Phœnicia, and of China, which he connects with all other superstitions under the sun, can be traced up through unnumbered ages to the profession, in each case, of faith in one Supreme God, the Creator and Ruler of the universe. It is true that he makes the great river of religious thought emanate from three separate sources, just as he traces back all the languages spoken among men to three distinct roots. But though the sources of the three streams be different, the waters which issue from them are all, at the outset, equally pure. The Chinese or Turanian superstition, with its "worship of a host of single spirits, representing the sky, sun, storm and lightning, mountains and rivers, one standing beside the other without any mutual attraction, and its adoration of deceased ancestors, had its beginnings, ages before Confucius was born, in a belief in two higher powers, good and evil. This double worship of human and natural spirits constitutes the

old popular religion of China, and it has lived on to the present day, at least in the lower ranks of society—though there towers above it a more elevated range of half-religious, half-philosophical faith, a belief in two higher powers, which, in the language of philosophy, may mean form and matter, and in the language of ethics, good and evil, but which, in the original language of religion and mythology, are represented as heaven and earth. It is true that we know the ancient popular religion of China from the works of Confucius only, or from even more modern sources. But Confucius, though he is called the founder of a new religion, was really but the preacher of an old religion. He was emphatically a transmitter—not a maker. He says himself: ‘I only hand on. I cannot create new things. I believe in the ancients, and therefore I love them.’”

Mr Müller scarcely expresses himself in these sentences with his usual clearness. There is some confusion in his thoughts, or in his manner of setting them forth; for at a subsequent page in his work he informs us, “It is in their historical books only we are told that heaven and earth together are the father and mother of all things. In the ancient poetry heaven alone is both father and mother. This spirit of heaven is known in Chinese by the name of Tien ; and wherever in other religions we should expect to see the name of the Supreme Being, we find in Chinese the name of

Tien, or Sky." From this Turanian fountain-head Max Müller makes the tide both of language and religion pour off in two streams through Tungusia, Mongolia, Tartary, and Finland in the north; and in the south, wherever Taic, Malaic, Bhotiya, and Tamulic are spoken. But here again he is somewhat inconsistent with himself; because, in a table elaborately drawn elsewhere in his volume, he makes it appear that Turanianism is, after all, only an offshoot from Aryanism. Now, if this latter assumption be correct, there are only two original sources—the Aryan and the Semite—in which the languages and the religions of all the nations of the earth had their beginnings. We examine these sources, and we find that in both the existence of one God, the Creator and Governor of the universe, is equally recognised. "For this Supreme Being all the branches of the Aryan family have names, of which the signification is everywhere the same. Dyaus in Sanscrit, becomes Zeus in Greek; Jovis in Latin, Tiu in German,—names which are not mere names, but facts more trustworthy than many facts of mediæval history." "These words are not mere words, but they bring before us, with all the vividness of an event which we witnessed ourselves but yesterday, the whole Aryan race—thousands of years, it may be, before Homer and the Veda—worshipping an unseen Being under the self-same name,—the best, the most exalted name they could

find in their vocabulary, under the name of Light and Sky."

By a similar process of examination, we discover that there was a period when the ancestors of the Semitic race made use of the same language and professed the same religion. "The period transcends the recollection of every one of the Semitic races, in the same way as neither Hindus, nor Greeks, nor Romans have any recollection of the time when they spoke a common language and worshipped their Father in heaven by a name that was as yet neither Sanscrit, nor Greek, nor Latin. But I do not hesitate to call this prehistoric period historical in the best sense of the word. It was a real period ; because, unless it was real, all the realities of the Semitic languages and the Semitic religions, such as we find them after the separation, would be unintelligible. Hebrew, Syriac, and Arabic point to a common source as much as Sanscrit, Greek, and Latin ; and unless we can bring ourselves to doubt that the Hindus, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Teutons derived the worship of their principal deity from their common Aryan sanctuary, we shall not be able to deny that there was likewise a primitive religion of the whole Semitic race, and that El, the strong one in heaven, was invoked by the ancestors of all the Semitic races before there were Babylonians in Babylon, Phœnicians in Sidon and Tyrus, before there were Jews in Mesopotamia or Jerusalem."

All this appears to us to be excellent as far as it goes. The able lecturer reasons well from the premises before him ; and we are not prepared to question the soundness of his conclusions, so far as that can be determined, by the points at which investigation has as yet arrived. But if this duplex origin of the human race be agreed to on the testimony of language, is there anything to prevent our reducing it to a unit on the testimony of religion ? Why should not some future philologist discover the link which has escaped Max Müller's penetration, acute though it be, whereby, at a period even more remote than he has reached, the Aryan and Semitic tongues coalesced ? We learn from our accomplished author that Aryans and Semites alike worshipped, in the infancy of their respective races, one and the self-same unseen God. Is there anything to forbid our further believing that the name given by both to the object of their common worship may have been originally the same ; and hence that Aryans, and Semites, and Turanians, with all the offshoots which they have severally cast out, may have sprung from a common stock, as they undoubtedly inherit a common nature ?

Thus far we have travelled side by side with one whose candour and love of truth are as conspicuous as his learning. We now reach a point where we are constrained, much against our will, to separate from him. Max Müller cannot believe in a primitive



revelation. He entirely rejects the theory of natural religion, as Paley and the theologians of the last century defined it. He is equally indisposed to take refuge in instinct; and the consequence is, that in order to account for a phenomenon in itself most wonderful, but of which he has demonstrated the reality, he shrouds himself in a phrase to which, as employed by him, we find ourselves unable to attach any definite meaning. Man, it appears, is a religious being, because there is in him *a faculty of faith*. "As there is a faculty of speech independent of all the historical forms of language, so there is a faculty of faith in man independent of all historical religion." Quite true. No reasonable man will call in question the soundness of either proposition; but what then? The term *faculty*, or *facultas*, as Mr Müller has himself well explained, expresses nothing more than the facilities or agilities, or, we may add, the capabilities of the mind, in one direction or another. The same thing may be said of the faculties or capabilities of the body, such as its aptitude to swim or to perform any of the feats of the circus. But unless the individual man be shown how to swim, and learn to ride like a centaur, he will certainly be drowned if you fling him into deep water, and will probably break his neck the first time he tries to stand upright on a hunting-saddle with his horse at full speed. Precisely similar are the conditions of all the faculties

or facilities with which the human mind is endowed. The intelligent savage is just as much gifted with the facility of calculation as the most accomplished mathematician. But what answer will he make to you if you ask him to solve the simplest problem in algebra? Again, in every man not destitute of reason there is a faculty or facility of acquiring new languages, and otherwise adding to his stock of knowledge from day to day. But till some language different from his own be brought within his reach, how is he to learn it? and unless by reading or foreign travel he accumulate fresh ideas, whence is the increase in his knowledge to be derived?

Apply this reasoning to the subject under discussion, and see to what issues it leads. Man is gifted by nature, or endowed by the Creator, with a faculty of faith. Were the case otherwise, he could not possibly become a religious being at all. But something is needed to bring this faculty into active operation. Is he competent by a mere act of volition to effect this object? If he be, the power must come to him either from instinct, or such a process of inductive reasoning as Paley has imagined. But Max Müller has rejected both theories as inadmissible. Does he suppose that a satisfactory escape from the dilemma in which he thus places us, is afforded by quoting for our edification the German word "Vernunft," as opposed to "Verstand" and "Sinne"?

With all possible respect for our accomplished philosopher, we shall venture to place before him another view of the subject. Whether the whole race of man be descended from one, or from two, or from three stocks, is a question the right solution of which is not necessary for our present purpose. Consider how it must have fared with the first pair, or with several pairs of men and women, called suddenly into being ; or, if we accept the Darwinian theory, evolved suddenly from some lower type of animal life, and planted by the power which so dealt with them amid circumstances the most favourable to the continued maintenance of their existence. What inducements would have been presented to them, what leisure afforded to aim at objects more sublime than how to provide the sustenance necessary for each returning day ? Without tools or weapons of any kind, without experience of the past or habits of forethought for the future, by what conceivable means could this faculty of faith be brought into active operation ? Conscious of their own existence, and conscious of little else, they are pressed by wants which they soon discover to be common to them and the inferior animals. Is it conceivable that, during the first generation at least, or indeed during many generations, the idea would occur to them that the labours necessary to supply these wants must be interrupted in order that they might excogitate for

moral purposes a religious system, based upon belief in an unseen God and their own personal responsibility to Him for every act of their lives ?

Again, Max Müller feels as strongly as we do that religion is necessary to the establishment of human society—that without it law would either not obtain at all, or would soon degenerate into the law of brute force. Can he, entertaining these opinions, reconcile to his own belief in the absolute wisdom and beneficence of the Creator the supposition that the Creator would leave His rational creatures even for a single generation uninstructed in points so necessary to the accomplishment of the purposes for which they were created ?—For never lose sight of the fact that all man's advances in arts and science are incident to the original formation of society, and dependent upon it. It is in the tribe that the first move is made from the cave or hole in the earth to the wigwam. It is the tribe which constructs the canoe, and applies it to the passage of the river. The solitary hunter, or pair of hunters, live and must die mere animals of the chase. But the tribe itself, the lowest stage of human society, would scarcely hold together—it certainly could make no progress towards a state of things wherein the rights of property are recognised—except by the operation of a principle more potent to control the will than the dread of detection by man, which can easily be

evaded, or the fear of punishment which may never befall. Religion is that principle. Is it conceivable that He who made man what he is, would cast him loose upon the earth destitute of this, the only real safeguard against frightful evils—the only sure guide to civilisation and refinement ?

We think, then, that Mr Müller does scant justice to his own powers of thought when he condemns as illusory the notion that the elements or first principles of religion may have come to primitive man by a process which the old divines describe as revelation. It is even possible that between his theory and theirs, rightly understood, the affinity may be closer than he imagines ; for the faculty of faith, of which he entertains so just and exalted an opinion, is exercised on many other than religious subjects. Take it away from man, and the business of life would come to end. There could be neither commerce, nor learning, nor social order anywhere. It is through the faculty of faith—in other words, because he has confidence in his correspondent or agent—that one merchant accepts the note of hand of another, or consigns to him a valuable cargo to be disposed of and accounted for. It is the faith which he reposes in the superior knowledge of his tutor which leads the schoolboy to believe without inquiry that to the scanning of a line in Virgil he must bring only dactyls and spondees ; and laws are obeyed because the



faculty of faith in the million impresses them with the conviction that both the will and the power of enforcing obedience is inherent in the government. In each of these cases, however, the capability of trusting grows into active trust or faith only after an appeal has been made to it by something external to itself. That something is, in trade, the superior intelligence of one merchant bearing upon the inferior intelligence of another—in learning, the impress of the stronger mind on the weaker—in government, the force of example, the arrest, the prison, the trial, the execution. In religion, the impulse which sets the faculty in motion may have been given simultaneously with the dawn of man's intelligence. But not the less, as it appears to us, are we justified in believing that the power which created in man "the yearning desire for something that neither sense nor reason can supply," would not, in the exercise of an infinite benevolence, fail to indicate, by some process or another, the means by which alone this yearning could be appeased.

## CHAPTER III.

RELIGIONS RESTING ON SACRED BOOKS—TEN REDUCIBLE TO TWO—  
THE MOST ANCIENT OF THE VEDIC HYMNS COMMITTED TO WRITING  
ABOUT THE SAME TIME WITH THE PENTATEUCH—THEY EQUALLY  
INCITE TO THE WORSHIP OF THE ONE TRUE GOD—THE DECLEN-  
SION FROM THIS FAITH IN BOTH THE ARYAN AND SEMITIC RACES  
—HOW THE PROCESS WENT ON—VEDIC HYMNS FAIL TO CHECK IT  
AMONG THE ARYANS—THE ISRAELITES ALONE AMONG THE SHEM-  
ITES RESTRAINED FROM IT—THEIR SACRED BOOKS WRITTEN IN  
AN ARCHAIC LANGUAGE—BUT SACRED HISTORY ESSENTIALLY RE-  
LIABLE—THE DELUGE.

AMONG the countless diversities of religion professed by tribes and nations, now and long ago, only ten can in any sense be described as resting on the authority of canonical books. From this category we exclude, of course, the old paganisms both of Egypt and of Greece, because the mythologies of Hesiod and Homer were held in small respect by the classic nations ; and from the scraps of what appear to be sacred writings found on rolls of papyrus in Egypt, it is impossible to draw any conclusions respecting the faith and ceremonial worship of its ancient inhabitants. We have, therefore, among the Aryans a restricted ascending scale,

which passes from the Granth, the sacred volume of the Sikhs, through the Tripitaka of the Buddhists, and the Zend-Avesta of the Zoroastrians to the Veda of the Brahmins ; while the Semitic races present us with no more than the Koran of the Mohammedans, the New Testament of the Christians, and the Old Testament of the Hebrews. In addition to these, there are in China, sacred among the disciples of Confucius, the five King and four Shu books ; the Tao-te-King or Bible of the followers of La-o-tse, and certain writings which are held to be sacred by the professors of the religion of Fo. But everywhere else—in Asia, Europe, and Africa—we look in vain for sacred records, or anything which can be regarded as such, other than the merest fragments at second hand. What may have been the case in Mexico and Peru, when these semi-civilised states were invaded by the Spaniards, it is impossible to say, because Spanish Vandalism destroyed, in the name of true religion, almost everything which might have thrown light upon one of the most interesting chapters of human history. But we know to a certainty that elsewhere throughout the American continent, written religious records there were none, the red men having been destitute, till brought in contact with the white, of written language in any form. It appears, then, that religion, though universal among mankind, has been kept alive, except in ten instances, by tradition only. And it

will further appear that even these ten exceptional cases resolve themselves, when more closely examined, into two, or at the most into three.

The religion of the Sikhs, for example, is nothing more than a compound of Brahminism and Moham-medanism, and its Granth a mere blending of the Veda and the Koran. Zoroastrianism is but a deviation from the straight course of the original Vedic faith ; and Buddhism, though antagonistic to Brahminism, springs directly from it. The intimate connection of the Koran and the New Testament with the old Hebrew Scriptures we need not pause to point out ; and as the religion of Fo is only a corruption of Buddhism transferred to China, no account whatever need be taken of it. Nor must we stop even here. If the Turanian branch of the human family be, as Max Müller asserts, an offshoot from the Aryan, then the Turanian Scriptures, like the Scriptures of the Zoroastrians and the Buddhists, must be regarded as transcripts modified and corrupted from the Vedas. In this case, we have only two sets of canonical books to examine, and the results to which our investigation leads are certainly very curious.

In the first place, the accepted dates of the Penta-teuch and Rig-Veda are to all intents and purposes identical. The oldest of the Vedic hymns are pronounced by competent authorities to have been committed to writing about 1200 or 1300 years before

Christ. The Pentateuch, if the Mazeretic chronology be trustworthy, underwent the same process only a century, or at most a century and a half, earlier. Neither the one nor the other, moreover, pretends to enunciate religious truths that are new. The oldest of the Vedic hymns give glory and worship to one God whom they address as the Father of Heaven or Heavenly Father. The great purpose of the Pentateuch is to insure that the worship of the Father in heaven shall be maintained in its purity. Both point to ages long anterior to their own, when this sublime faith and simple worship were universal; and one, at least, alludes to deterioration in these respects already begun, and protests against its farther extension.

Again, the languages of the Pentateuch and of the Rig-Veda are equally archaic, capable only of clothing in words, thoughts not yet so disciplined as to distinguish between powers in the abstract, and their exercise by some visible and tangible being. And another peculiarity is common to both. They equally indicate a social condition which has gone through various phases, and is passing into more, with which they make no attempt to interfere, further than by guarding—each in its own peculiar way—the primitive religion from becoming, amid these changes, symbolised and degraded into a sensuous and demoralising superstition.

We are assured by those who have made them the



subject of their study, that the Vedic hymns embody ideas which for unnumbered ages had been prevalent among all the tribes and families of Aryan descent. We gather from the book of Genesis that the pure faith of Abraham was at one time professed by the whole human race. We learn also from the same source, that among the Semitic tribes which had settled in Palestine, there was one at least which, in Abraham's day, retained the patriarchal faith in its simplicity and purity. Indeed there is nothing to show that whithersoever Abraham wandered — in Mesopotamia, in Egypt, or in the land of promise — was the existence denied of a God, supreme over all other gods, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. All this shows that, three or four thousand years ago, the growth of polytheism, though begun, had not advanced so far among the offshoots from either the Aryan or the Semitic stock, as to obliterate the recollection of the primitive monotheism, though it had very largely obscured it.

Again, we know that a few centuries later than the accepted date of the oldest of the Vedic hymns, a great change for the worse occurred in the religion of the Aryans. Brahminism came in, with its iron institution of castes, and its many-sided representations of the divine attributes, under the influence of which the pure theism of the Rig-Veda entered little, if at all, into the religion taught by the priests and adopted by

the people. In like manner, we know that about the period of the Exodus, the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Carthaginians, the Moabites, and the Philistines, had all superinduced upon the monotheism which their Semitic ancestors handed down to them, superstitions as cruel as they were abominable.

The knowledge of these facts, and a contemplation of the shapes which, both among Aryans and Shemites, polytheism assumed, enable us, with something like moral certainty, to follow, step by step, the downward course into which the primitive religion of both races fell. While as yet the family subsisted in its isolation, wife, sons, and daughters, beheld in the husband and the father both their priest and their king ; his religion was their religion ; his will was their law. But by-and-by the sons and daughters became themselves parents, whereupon the condition of the family made way for that of the tribe or clan. This seems to have brought with it for a while no very important changes in the organisation of society, which still recognised in the patriarch, as long as he survived, and in the first-born of his sons after his decease, its natural head in matters both civil and religious. Indeed, wherever at this day we encounter portions of mankind advanced no further than the first stage beyond family life, the same order of things is discernible. The will of the chief is law to the tribe, with or without the advice of the elders : and

in the conduct of religious worship he invariably takes the lead. So it was in the childhood of the whole human race. A few prayers sent up to the Supreme, with perhaps a sacrifice or an offering presented at some chosen place, and at stated times, comprised, in all probability, the whole of the primeval liturgy.

It is obvious, however, that simple as these devotional exercises were, they could hardly be repeated day by day, or week by week, without laying the foundation of future abuses. In the religion of these primitive worshippers there might not be, according to our theory—there could not be—the faintest tinge of idolatry. It was always to the unseen God, by whom the faculty of faith, inherent in their nature, had been stirred to action, that they addressed their petitions. But, according to the exigencies of the moment, they would gradually learn to appeal to Him through one or other of the many attributes of which they believed Him to be possessed. Thus at sunrise they doubtless bowed the head in thankfulness to God, the giver and restorer of light. If their pastures dried up, they besought Him who was the cloud-compeller to send rain. If it thundered, and they were afraid, they besought the terrible Master of storms to shield them from danger. If their fruits failed, or their flocks proved barren, they cried to Him who was the source and origin of all life to remove the judgment from them. Hence light, strength, or

power—the nutritive force, the generative force—came, with many more, to be regarded for a while, not indeed as distinct deities, but as the agents or ministers of the one supreme Being, who employed them to do His bidding for the comfort or punishment of His human creatures.

So it was while the original tribe held together, when language was oral only, and the creeds of men were as simple as the extent of their capacities was narrow. But when swarm after swarm left the parent hive, a confusion of ideas on the subject rapidly intervened. Still retaining their belief in the existence of a God supreme over all other gods, these emigrants learned to think of each operation of nature as guided by its own divinity, whose favour must be propitiated, and his wrath averted, by a process different from that which would be acceptable to the divinities by whom other operations of nature were controlled. Out of this polytheism arose the priesthood, as an institution distinct from the chiefship of the clan, and the *patria potestas* in the family; and with the priesthood came in all those abuses which, in the end, separated religion from ethics, and made the worship of the gods consist in acts which were often immoral, and not unfrequently ferocious. Nor is it any valid objection to this theory to urge, that if a knowledge of the principles of true religion had in the beginning been communicated to

man by God, their subsequent corruption would have been impossible. Why impossible ? Man is a responsible being, because he is a free agent. Every faculty of which he is possessed comes from God, and among the rest this faculty of faith, the continuous application of which to a right or a wrong end, is not, and cannot be determined, except by the voluntary action of the individual man, or the collective voluntary action of the community. Besides, we have a right to assume, because the fact is recognised in all religions, that in some way or another man's present state of existence has always been regarded as a preparation for a higher, which he shall attain, or fail to attain, according as he conforms the habits of his life to God's will. All religions tell us this—the rudest and most degrading, as well as the purest and most sublime ; and all equally base their claim to the assent of their votaries, on the belief that God's will was revealed to their fathers with or without the intervention of human agency by God Himself. Now it is not the part of a philosopher to think lightly of the concurrence of universal opinion on such a subject. When we find that in every known land, and among every known people, there emerges from their superstitions, however wild, the acknowledgment that all things proceed from one common source, and that to this universal Father universal reverence is due, it seems scarcely possible to doubt



that a faith at once so rational and simple must have had its root in a primitive revelation. Take two examples at what may be called the very opposite ends of the pole. The Zulus, when first visited by Europeans, were pronounced to be devoid of all religion; they did not so much as recognise the existence of a God. It is now admitted that a tradition survived among them, and still survives, of the descent of the various families and clans from special ancestors; of the descent of these ancestors from one who was the common father of mankind, and of the production of this common father by the Creator of all things, symbolised under a word which, when literally interpreted, means a shoot-producing reed. Look at a picture directly the reverse of this. In India at the present day, overrun, as it appears to be, with the grossest idolatries, the Hindu mind still retains the impress of a purer faith. "It is a most noteworthy circumstance," writes Mr Vaughan—whose acquaintance, from long residence among them, with the people of India and their habits, is second to that of no living authority—"that as regards the Hindus, their ever-growing polytheism has never been able to banish an impression of one supreme God. In India you hear the people speak of Ishwar (God), or Parera Ishwar (the great God); but you never hear them use these terms in the plural number." \*

\* In a private letter to myself.

In accepting this theory—in believing that there is not on the face of the earth a religion so degraded but that its roots are struck in everlasting truth—we not only do no outrage to Christianity, and to the Mosaic dispensation from which it sprang, but we enhance the claims of both on the universal reverence of mankind. For religion, if it be God's gift to man—and such we hold it to be—neither is nor was ever intended to come before man as a thing of mere creeds and dogmas. These belong rather to the region of metaphysics than of morals ; and with man's moral being, not with the exercise of his intellectual powers, true religion has to do. The primitive revelation, therefore, we may rest assured, was at once simple and intelligible in the extreme. How conveyed, we do not presume to determine ; but we may surely venture, without presumption, to take for granted that its object was so to train and discipline the wills of its recipients, that the motives presented to them for the exercise of self-control should be of weight enough, if fairly dealt by, to counteract the impulses of passion and appetite. We, indeed, as religious men, accustom ourselves to speak of advancing God's glory, and extending the limits of God's kingdom. But these are nothing more than the outpourings of devotional feeling transmuted into words, which, unless they be read metaphorically, can have no meaning whatever. God's glory admits of no advancement by man ; to God's kingdom there

are no limits. And if the contrary were the case, the God who made an instrument of man for the selfish advancement of His own glory and the extension of His own sovereignty, would not be the God whom we Christians worship. No. As the obvious purpose for which man has been placed here is, that he shall fit and prepare himself for a higher state of existence hereafter, so it is the true end of religion to be his guide in this great endeavour, to inform him of the relation in which he stands towards the Creator, and to make clear to his understanding, as well as to his feelings, the process by which God's favour is to be won, and his own nature assimilated to that of the source whence he came. Now, the only idea which it is possible for us to form of God in His relationship with the living world, is that of a Being absolutely and entirely benevolent. No doubt we assign to Him also the attributes of perfect wisdom, boundless mercy, and perfect justice. We do well in thus expressing ourselves, and the reason is obvious. Benevolence, separated from any or all of these attributes, degenerates into maudlin sentimentality, the association of which with the Author of the universe is a contradiction in terms.

To the free will of a Being absolutely and entirely benevolent, man therefore owes his existence. A place also has been assigned to him in creation of which the landmarks are obvious to every eye that can see. He

is gifted with reason, in virtue of which all things animate and inanimate within the compass of the visible world become his servants ; and to the other faculties or powers of his mind is added what Max Müller calls the faculty of faith. By this he is able to grasp the idea, when suggested to him, of a Being unseen, yet everywhere present, to whom he is responsible for the uses to which are applied those faculties that come to him by the fiat of his Creator. Now, what is really involved in all this ? That the primitive religion, so far as it was theological, inculcated a belief in one God—that man was taught to worship this one God in spirit and in truth—that with God there is no respect of persons—and that man's duty to man amounts briefly to this, that each shall do to all what, were their circumstances reversed, his own conscience tells him he would desire that others should do to him. Here, then, is man's trial, the probation and discipline that are set before him. By nature he is eminently selfish : you see this at the first dawn of his intellect ; you trace it, too often, still in operation during the last hours of his conscious existence. By no other influence than that of religion can this innate depravity be overcome ; and only the religion which sets before man reasons why he ought to struggle against and subdue it can come from God.

We have seen how in the beginning the seeds of true religion were sown in the hearts of men ; we

have seen also how rapid was, in process of time, the declension from truth in its simplicity, and the causes of such declension. Among the Hindus, we are assured, the conviction still prevails that the oldest of the Vedic hymns were chanted in the religious worship of their ancestors for thousands of years before they were committed to writing. We know that within three or four centuries after the date assigned for the performance of this act, the religion of the Hindus had degenerated into a grovelling superstition. Individuals might still be found who could see through the eccentricities of Brahma, Vishnu, and Krishna to the truth ; but the popular faith was polytheism in its most degrading form, bringing with it the terrible inequalities of caste and the grossest immorality. The attempt first of Zoroaster, and by-and-by of Buddha, to reform the popular religion, succeeded only so far, that the former restored among his followers the worship of the unseen, symbolised by fire and the sun ; the latter got rid of caste, and substituted for polytheism what amounted rather to atheism than pantheism. But in the region of morals, not the least important part of religion, the triumphs of both were comparatively insignificant. Buddha left things in this respect pretty much as he found them, inasmuch as the business of life is incompatible with the process by which he taught his followers how perfection was to be attained ; while Zoroaster, though inculcating up-



right dealings in the intercourse of man with man, sanctioned practices against which our natural instinct revolts.

Into what excesses and contradictions Brahminism ran in its progress further and further from its centre, this is not the occasion on which to speak. The fierce religion of the Norsemen and the voluptuous mythology of the Greeks may, equally with the fire-worship of the Parsees and the extravagance of African paganism, be traced back to it as their common source. And not less certain is it that into the philosophical systems of the Old World, both in the west and in the east, Brahminical theories largely made their way. This, however, is a point into the consideration of which it would be premature at the present stage of our inquiry to enter. We therefore proceed at once to take a rapid survey of the course of events in that other branch of the human family to which all the most civilised nations of the world may be said, in a certain sense, to be indebted for the religion which they now profess.

Long before the descendants of Jacob take their place in history as an independent people, the Shemites had gone through a process of dislocation similar both in its causes and results to that of which we have spoken as incident to the Aryans. Like the Aryans, they professed in the earlier stage of their existence a pure and sublime faith, which, as one colony

after another went forth from the common centre, gradually corrupted itself. Sabeism, or the worship of the heavenly bodies, would appear to have been the first form which with them polytheism assumed. This came about naturally, so to speak, among pastoral tribes scattered sparsely over the vast plains of Assyria and Mesopotamia, though it appears never to have obliterated in them the conviction that above all these visible deities there was one God invisible and supreme. Indeed, the name of this supreme Being is essentially the same in all the dialects of the Semitic language with which we are acquainted. The Eloah of the Hebrews is the Ilâh of the Arabs; the Eliun of the Phœnicians; and the Bel or Baal of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Carthaginians, the Moabites, and the Philistines.

It does not come within the scope of these essays to trace step by step the decadence of the old Semitic religion in any part of the world. Our purpose is sufficiently served when we point out that more than a beginning had been made in that direction during the lifetime of Abraham; and that at the period of the Exodus, if the mythology of the Shemite tribes, with whom the Israelites came in contact, was less extravagant than that of the Aryans their contemporaries, the requirements of their religion were to the full as demoralising. You cannot read the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy without being

made aware of that fact. All the impurities and cruelties therein guarded against entered into the religious life of the Ammonites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Hittites, and the neighbouring tribes of Moab and Philistia. In a word, though the name of the Most High retained its place in the divine hierarchy of the Semitic nations, there were mixed up with it the names of a host of inferior deities, to propitiate whom sacrifice and worship were offered, of the nature and tendency of which every reader of his English Bible is competent to form a correct opinion.

From amid this universal shipwreck of primitive truth the religion of a single people comes forth, in its theology as simple as when God first revealed Himself to the parents of the human race—in its moral rules, if contrasted with all that were in force elsewhere, wellnigh perfect. The people thus favoured are of Semitic origin. They have, like other main branches of the human family, their sacred book wherein are recorded the views entertained by their forefathers of the beginnings of things, as well as a succinct account of their own origin as a nation. The books in question are of various dates, and the product of various hands, the most recent being at least 2000 or 3000 years old, the more ancient many centuries older. They are written in a language which, as we have already said, is archaic, and, like all the cognate tongues of Babylonia, Assyria, and Canaan, has its roots in

Arabic. Not one of these languages, if we go back to the period of the Exodus, seems capable of expressing an abstract idea except under some metaphor borrowed from tangible objects. "I believe," says Max Müller, "that the Semitic languages have suffered less from mythology than the Aryan languages. Yet we have only to read the first chapter of Genesis in order to convince ourselves that we shall never understand an ancient language rightly unless we make allowance for the influence of ancient language on ancient thought. If we read, for instance, that after the first man was created one of his ribs was taken out, and that rib made into a woman, every student of ancient language sees at once that this account must not be taken in its bare, literal sense. We need not dwell on the fact that in the first chapter of Genesis a far less startling account of the creation of man and woman had been given. What could be simpler and therefore truer than, 'So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him ; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it'? The question then is, How, after this account of the creation of man and woman, could there be a second account of the creation of man, of his lone estate in the Garden of Eden, and of the removal of one of his ribs, which was to be made into a help-meet for him ?

“Those who are familiar with the genius of ancient Hebrew can hardly hesitate as to the original intention of such traditions. Let us remember that when we, in our modern languages, speak of the self-same thing, the Hebrews speak of the bone, the Arabs of the eye, of a thing. This is a well-known Semitic idiom, and it is not without analogies in other languages. ‘Bone’ seemed a telling expression for what we should call the innermost essence, ‘eye’ for what we should call the soul or self of a thing. In the ancient hymns of the Veda, too, a poet asks, ‘Who has seen the first-born, when he who had no *bones* (i.e., no form) bore him that had *bones*?’—i.e., when that which was formless assumed form; or, it may be, when that which had no essence received an essence. And he goes on to ask, ‘Where was the life, the blood, the soul of the world? Who sent to ask this from any that knew it?’ In the ancient language of the Veda, bone, blood, and breath are all meant to convey more than what we should call their material meaning; but in course of time the Sanscrit *âtman*, meaning originally breath, dwindled away into a mere pronoun, and came to mean self. The same applies to the Hebrew *’etzem*. Originally meaning bone, it came at last to be used as a mere pronominal adjective in the sense of self or same.

“After these preliminary explanations, we can well understand that while, if speaking and thinking in a



modern language, Adam might have been made to say to Eve, 'Thou art the same as I am,' such a thought would in ancient Hebrew be expressed by 'Thou art bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.' Let such an expression be repeated for a few generations only, and a literal—that is to say, a material and deceptive—interpretation would soon spring up; and people would at last bring themselves to believe that the first woman was formed from the bone of the first man, or from a rib—for the simple reason, it may be, because it could better be spared than any other bone. Such a misunderstanding, once established, retained its place on account of its very strangeness; for a taste for the unintelligible springs up at a very early time, and threatens to destroy, among the ancient nations, the power of appreciating whatever is simple, natural, and wholesome. Thus only can it be explained that the account of the creation of the woman obtained its place in the second chapter, though in clear opposition to what had been said in the first chapter of Genesis."\*

If it be allowable to adopt Max Müller's view of this subject—and his authority as a master in the science of language few would call in question—then all, or almost all, the difficulties that stand in the way of the sort of compromise which we have ventured to recommend will be removed. Admit that the Hebrew, like other ancient languages, is archaic—that there is no

\* Lectures on the Science of Religion, p. 44.

power in it to express abstract ideas except through the instrumentality of words signifying objects of sense,—and stumbling-blocks, which a forgetfulness of so simple and obvious a truth had erected, disappear of their own accord. Nor do we see how the most orthodox of believers can condemn this mode of procedure as profane. Everybody allows that the well-known phrase, “the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head,” cannot be read in its bare and literal sense. Every Christian believes that the thing signified is the ultimate triumph of good over evil, and the restoration of man to the place from which he had fallen as a creature intelligently and morally religious—in other words, to God’s favour. Why, then, should we shrink from dealing in a like spirit with all those passages of Holy Scripture wherein the Supreme Being is represented as taking an active, and, so to speak, a personal part in the affairs of men? Is it not the fact that, even in our own language, we can speak of the great Creator and His *modus operandi* only in figures? We say that God is a Spirit, meaning thereby that He is without material organs and human passions; yet daily, in our prayers, we deprecate His anger, implore His clemency, and beseech Him to stretch out His hand to deliver. Nay, more; we forget that the very term of which we make use in order to mark our appreciation of His immaterial nature is expressive of a material substance—that it

signifies breath. So impossible is it, even in the present age, and by a people among whom language may be considered to have reached perfection in its structure, to speak of "Him in whom we live, and move, and have our being," except in metaphors.

Does it therefore follow that, in order to meet objections urged with as little acquaintance with the science of language as, in their spirit, they are offensive to good taste, we must consign the entire Book of Genesis to the region of mythology? Surely not. From the moment we enter upon the career of the great man from whom the Jews derive their descent, we stand upon the sure ground of history. Interspersed the general narrative doubtless is with statements which may be read either literally or metaphorically, according to the temper of mind in which we approach the subject. But no thoughtful man, be his prepossessions what they may, can, we should think, close the book without being convinced that something more than the wanderings of the chief of a nomadic tribe has been brought under his notice—that he has been following the fortunes of one who stood in closer relationship towards the Creator than other men, and was manifestly set apart for the achievement of a great purpose. Observe that we do not pretend to determine either the exact mode by which this peculiar relationship was established, or to explain the process by which its reality came to be recognised by him who

was the object of it. The language of the Bible in regard to these matters is at once general and clear—leaving the widest scope free to the imagination of the reader, yet directing it towards one definite end. Here we read, “The Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country ;” there, “The Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward : for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.” Again : “When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said. . . . And Abram fell on his face : and God talked with him.” What have we in these several declarations ? Is it not the living picture of a man imbued with a sense of the deepest piety, convinced that a mighty future has been prepared for him and his descendants by the object of his worship ; sleeping, waking, travelling, resting with this solemn conviction continually upon his mind ; and by the strength of a will thus excited, and thus kept in constant play, working out his own high destiny ?

Of the earlier portion (the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis) this much at least may be said : Coloured somewhat by mythology they perhaps may be ; indeed it is hard to conceive how, in giving an account of events that occurred so far

back beyond the utmost limits of history, a writer who lived in what was still the childhood of the world could escape mixing up legend with truth. But compare the Mosaic account of the creation, and of the primitive state and subsequent dispersion of mankind, with what is told of all three in the sacred books of any other than the Hebrew people, or with the traditions that survive among tribes possessing no sacred books, and you are struck at once, not with the trifling extravagances which, looked at from our point of view, seem to disfigure the former, but with its severe simplicity. What can be more grand, more simple, more true, than the sentence with which the sacred narrative opens—"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"? No genealogy is attempted here of this God the Creator. No beings of a secondary order are brought in to aid or oppose Him in His work. He is the one sole and immediate cause of all things visible and invisible, the one sole and immediate object of worship to all His creatures. Have we not in this single declaration, considering the date of its composition and the state of public opinion in regard to theology which universally prevailed elsewhere, the true index, if the expression be admissible, to the purpose for which "all Holy Scripture was written"? And is it not the fact that he who loses sight of this index because in subsequent details incidents are recorded the reality of which he finds



it impossible to reconcile with the teaching of his own experience, does infinitely more harm to himself and to others than to the cause which he has undertaken to assail ?

What then ? Are we free to relinquish our belief in the Garden of Eden, in the tree of knowledge, in the wiles of the serpent, and in the dramatic scene which ensued upon the Fall, and still to call ourselves Christians ? Is God's curse upon the earth, in punishment of man's transgression, to go for nothing ? And the Deluge, and the consequences arising out of it—are they likewise to be explained away ? Certainly not. All these things are realities to us, whether, with the trustfulness of children, we accept the record literally as it stands, or discern the light of eternal truth through the veil of metaphor and symbol which human language, still most imperfect in its structure, has drawn before it. There is a Garden of Eden for every man whose conscience is at peace with itself, and who, in grateful reliance on God, is able by honest industry to provide for his own moderate wants and the wants of those most dear to him. In every man's way there is a tree of knowledge of good and evil, and a serpent within, prompting him to eat the fruit and to dare the consequences. And having eaten, how true it is that not only would he hide himself if he could from God's presence, but that for him the whole course of nature is changed ! Ask

the wretched criminal immured in his cell, whom a burst of passion had hurried into some one criminal act, whether the dramatic scene in the Book of Genesis be to him a myth or a reality. And as to the Deluge, and the consequences arising out of it, why should the idea of explaining them away be suggested? Reference to a catastrophe of the sort is to be found among the traditions of almost all the nations of the world. The Chaldean story, preserved in a fragment of Berosus, bears a close resemblance, in all its details, to that told in the Hebrew Bible. Notices of a flood are to be found in the Phœnician and Phrygian mythologies. Persia, India, and China, all have their records of a like event; and throughout the continent of America the tradition seems to have been universal. With Ovid's story of Deucalion and Pyrrha every schoolboy is familiar; but it may not be so generally known that among the Tamanaki, a Carib tribe on the Orinoko, a legend survives bearing to his tale an extraordinary resemblance. According to Ovid, the earth was repopled by Deucalion and Pyrrha throwing stones (that is, the bones of the earth) behind their backs. According to the Tamanaki, a man and his wife, escaping from the flood to the top of the mountain Tapanaca, repopled the earth by flinging over their heads the fruit of the Mauritia palm. But perhaps not the least curious of all, is the tradition which Mr Wilkes ascertained to

be preserved in the Fiji Islands—the latest addition to the British empire—when he visited and surveyed them. “After the island had been peopled by the first man and woman, a great rain took place, by which they were finally submerged. But before the highest places were covered by the waters, two large canoes made their appearance. In one of these was Rokora, the god of carpenters ; in the other, Rokola, his head-workman, who picked up some of the people and kept them on board until the waters had subsided, after which they were landed in the island. It is reported that in former times canoes were always kept in readiness against another inundation. The persons thus saved, eight in number, were landed at Mbenga, where the highest of their gods is said to have made his appearance. By virtue of this tradition, the chiefs of Mbenga take rank before all others, and have always acted a conspicuous part among the Fijis. They style themselves *Ngali-duva-ki-langi*—subject to heaven alone.”

Is it, then, contended, in the face of objections insurmountable, that the deluge from which Noah and his family were saved literally and actually overwhelmed the whole earth ? Admit the possibility of a stupendous miracle, and the contention may, without hesitation, be put forward. The water of the globe is to the land in the proportion of three-fifths to two-fifths. There was, therefore, water

enough in the different seas and lakes to cover the whole earth ; and the earth, made subject to an instantaneous subsidence, might have remained under water for twelve months, as stated in the Book of Genesis, or even for a larger space of time, without any trace of such submersion being now discernible. But surely there is no moral or physical necessity imposed upon us as Christians to contend for such a submersion. The references in the New Testament to the Deluge are too few and too general to affect our judgment in the matter, one way or another. In the Gospels of St Matthew and St Luke, Christ Himself is indeed represented as referring to the Deluge ; but in both cases the reference is made under peculiar circumstances. He is speaking of His own second coming to judge the world, and refers to the Flood in terms which leave the question now at issue entirely open. St Matthew makes Him say, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away ; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Precisely to the same purport is St Luke's version of the incident : "And as it

was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all." Again, in each of the Epistles of St Peter, the Flood is alluded to; and in the second of these letters, Noah is described as the eighth person saved. But all this is quite compatible with the conclusion, that the Noachian deluge may have extended over a very limited portion of the globe—perhaps over no more than the valley of the Euphrates. If, therefore, we be told that a belief in the entire destruction of the old world by a flood of water presents an insurmountable obstacle to that common understanding on sacred subjects which we are anxious to promote, the reply is obvious. Treat the Noachian flood, if it so please you, as a partial deluge. We may or may not be able to adopt your views, but we cannot allow a difference of opinion about a point comparatively of so little moment to stand in the way of a community of faith in matters infinitely more important.



## CHAPTER IV.

ARE THE SEVERAL BOOKS WHICH MAKE UP THE SCRIPTURES OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS AUTHENTIC?—WERE THEIR WRITERS INSPIRED?—WHAT ARE THE TRUE LIMITS OF INSPIRATION?—HAVE OTHER THAN JEWISH PROPHETS AND CHRISTIAN APOSTLES BEEN GUIDED BY INSPIRATION?—THE REAL END WHICH THE PENTATEUCH WAS MEANT TO SERVE.

WE have not as yet touched upon certain points, without arriving at a clear understanding as to which, every effort to solve the problem now under consideration must prove fruitless. I. Is there evidence enough extant to satisfy rational inquirers that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are what they profess to be — authentic documents? II. Is there anything to show that the writers of the various treatises which make up the canon of Scripture were inspired men? and if inspired, to what extent, and in reference to what subjects, are we to assume that the divine gift was conceded to them? III. Is it necessary to believe that only to them and the remarkable characters whom they describe, the divine gift was granted? In other words, must we look upon the

whole race of men outside the pale of the Jewish and Christian Churches as forsaken by their Creator in times past — and, till converted to Christianity, as forsaken still ? We will endeavour to answer these questions in a spirit of perfect candour ; because thus, and thus alone, can truth, the common object of all honest inquiry, be arrived at.

Inverting the order in which the queries are set down, our reply to the last must, in either of its sections, be a negation. It is impossible for those who believe in a primitive revelation, who discover in the oldest of the Vedic hymns the outpourings of devotion as deep and pure as in the Psalms of David,\* from whom the wildest absurdities of the most extravagant of paganisms cannot hide the germ of truth which underlies them all—it is impossible for any one who has arrived at these conclusions to suppose that, throughout the unnumbered centuries which preceded the coming of Christ, the Spirit of God held no

\* Here is a specimen of these Vedic hymns :—

1. Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

2. He who gives life. He who gives strength ; whose command all the bright gods revere ; whose shadow is immortality ; whose shadow is death. Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

3. He who through His power is the one King of the breathing and awaking world. He who governs all—man and beasts. Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

4. He whose greatness these snowy mountains proclaim ; whose greatness the sea proclaims with the distant river. He to whom these regions are, as it were, His two arms. Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

5. He through whom the sky is bright and the earth firm. He

communion with the spirits of men, except within the narrow limits of one favoured nationality. On the contrary, every teacher of everlasting verities, every moral regenerator of the world, in whatever age he may have lived, in whatever land he may have laboured, deserves, in the opinion of all who accept this creed, to be spoken of as an inspired man. To the shortcomings in some important respects of Buddha and Zoroaster we have alluded elsewhere; and in Socrates himself we find a master-mind capable of apprehending, but imperfectly, what it was reserved for one infinitely greater than he to make clear. But who can doubt that so far as each taught his disciples to worship the unseen God in their lives rather than with their lips, he obeyed the impulses of that Holy Spirit "which worketh hitherto," and shall never cease to work? Are not they, indeed, and thousands like them, of whose very names and nationalities we are ignorant, the persons of whom our Lord said,

through whom the heaven was established—nay, the highest heaven. He who measured out the light in the air. Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

6. He to whom heaven and earth, standing tremblingly by His will, look up trembling inwardly. He over whom the rising sun shines forth. Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

7. He who by His might looked even over the water-clouds—the clouds which gave strength and lit the sacrifice. He who alone is God above all gods. Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

8. May He not destroy us. He the Creator of the earth; or He the righteous who created the heaven. He also created the bright and mighty waters. Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

“Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold” ? And do not both St Peter and St Paul support us in this conclusion,—the former by his well-known exclamation when about to receive Cornelius into the Church ; the latter by quoting to the people of Athens the words of one of their own poets, when seeking to draw their attention to the message which he was commissioned to convey to them ?—“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons : but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him.” “Seek the Lord, if haply ye may feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us : for in Him we live, and move, and have our being ; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring.” It is not, therefore, inconsistent with perfect orthodoxy to believe that to others besides Jewish prophets and Christian apostles the gift of inspiration was conceded—in less measure, no doubt, yet so that they should contribute, each in his own peculiar sphere, towards that moral discipline whereby the minds of men were prepared to receive and to profit by the last and most perfect revelation of God’s will and man’s duty, which came to them through Christ Jesus.

II. But is there anything to show that the writers of the various treatises which make up the canon of Scripture were themselves inspired ? and if inspired,

to what extent, and in reference to what subjects, was divine illumination granted to them ?

We must have succeeded very imperfectly in thus far making ourselves understood, if the reply which we are prepared to give to this question be not anticipated. Inspiration, according to the theory maintained throughout these essays, has to do only with subjects that lie beyond the grasp of unassisted reason. Men do not become astronomers, geologists, physiologists, or masters generally of science, by inspiration. On the contrary, it is one of the highest privileges of the nature which God has given us that we find our happiness in working out by our own exertions discoveries in physical science. For by these discoveries, and the use to which we apply them, we make the laws of nature subservient to our requirements, and advance ourselves, generation by generation, to a higher and still higher place in the order of animated being. And to the attainment of all these ends the powers of unaided reason are competent. But the moment we pass into the region of abstract thought reason fails us. The principle of life, which we see in active operation all round us, what is it ? And what, especially, am I who ask this of myself ? Why should I impose the smallest restraint upon a passion or an appetite if the means of gratifying it be brought safely and easily within my reach ? And this intellect of mine, which never grows weary by exer-



cise, and in the exercise of which I find my loftiest enjoyment, is it to go out like the light of a candle which is extinguished when I die ? or is there reserved for me, in another state of being, opportunities more abundant than I encounter here, of adding continually to my stock of knowledge, and by promoting the happiness of those with whom I come in contact, more and more insuring my own ? These are questions which the most profound thinkers the world has ever seen have put to themselves in every age, without eliciting a satisfactory reply, and to which a satisfactory reply will never be obtained, if, taking no account whatever of the faculty of faith, we appeal to reason only. While, therefore, we claim for the prophets and apostles of old, that in this region of thought they were under the guidance of a light which cannot mislead, in all other respects we are surely free to believe that they were men of like passions and prejudices with ourselves. As they speak the language, so they think the thoughts, of their nation and their time, and clothe them with the imagery, and illustrate them from the circumstances, of their daily life. On what pretence, indeed, could it be urged, that in order to fit him for the work to which God's providence had set him, it was necessary that the founder of the Hebrew commonwealth should be a Newton, a Lyell, or a Huxley ? Or, supposing him thus accomplished, and desirous of imparting to others the mere rudiments of the science

in which he was a master, is it not self-evident that a people so barbarous as history represents his countrymen to have been, never could have understood his lessons, or the object of them ? In like manner, having to deal with persons not more capable than infants of taking in an abstract idea, how could he speak to them of the great First Cause otherwise than as up-grown men speak of the Creator to little children ? Hence anthropomorphism forms the central point, so to speak, in the old Hebrew mythology. Whether the expressions which represent the Deity in this light set forth the convictions of the Hebrew lawgiver himself, is a point into which no thoughtful man will stop to inquire ; because, apart from the difficulties arising out of an archaic language, no demonstration in Euclid can be more certain than that only by imagery of this sort may the conviction that there is a God who governs the world, and whose will it is that men should pursue moral good and avoid moral evil, be at any time, and in any country, brought down to the level of untutored capacities.

But are such views of inspiration compatible with a belief in the divine authority of the Bible ? Are they not, on the contrary, at variance with what we read, not in the decrees of ancient councils only, and in the confessions of faith by which Christian Churches still continue to be bound, but with the explicit declaration of Scripture itself ? “ All Scripture,” says the

apostle, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness : that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." With the decrees of councils and the declarations of Churches we shall not for the present interfere, further than by pointing out, that if, on the authority of this single text—and you cannot quote another of similar import from the Bible—they affirm, and require others to accept, the theory of verbal and plenary inspiration, they rest their claim to be accepted as supreme guides of public opinion on a very unstable foundation. There needs but slight acquaintance with the original Greek to discover that the sentence here quoted is elliptic, and that it will convey one meaning or another to the mind of the reader, according to the place which he assigns to the verb *is* in its construction. Take the sentence thus—and the rendering is perfectly legitimate—and the assent of all thoughtful men to the declaration enunciated by it, will at once be secured : "All God-inspired Scripture is given, and is profitable for correction, for instruction in righteousness," &c. We need not, however, dwell on this critical problem, because the number of educated persons is probably very small who could, in these days, be persuaded to accept in its bare and literal sense every word or phrase which he finds either in the Old or New Testament. Not to make too much of the need of a

standing miracle, if a text passed on by the process of transcription from generation to generation, through many hundreds of years, is to be kept safe from interpolations and changes—not to make anything at all of the discrepancies which actually occur in different versions of Holy Scripture, because these are rarely of much moment—it is sufficient to observe that neither the prophets themselves, whose business it was, under the old dispensation, to declare God's will to the people, nor the leaders in the great work of building up the Church of Christ, claim always to be inspired. The man of God who carried the message of wrath to Bethel spoke from God, and the event verified his prediction. He was certainly not under the guidance of inspiration when he listened to the voice of the deceiver, and turned back to eat bread. So, likewise, our Lord's followers claim to be inspired only when they deliver to others, orally or in writing, the precepts of their divine Master. Indeed, the promises made to them by Christ, previously to His death, fully justify the view which, in this respect, they take of their own condition. "It is expedient for you that I go away ; for if I go not away, the Comforter" (or, as the word may be translated, the Teacher or Reminder) "will not come to you." "When He is come, He will recall to your remembrance all that I have said unto you." In like manner they are charged, when brought before judges and rulers for

their Master's sake, to take no thought what they shall say. "It will be given to you in that day what ye shall say." "It is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost." "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which is in you." A different mode of expression is employed when the importance of the testimony they are to bear to the life and conversation of their Lord is insisted upon. "Ye shall testify of these things, because you have been with me from the beginning." He need not, therefore, be charged with misrepresenting the theory of inspiration, who assumes that, in whatever measure necessary, and therefore granted, in order that the teaching of the apostles might be in perfect accord with that of their Lord, it could scarcely be needed to direct three or four upright and honourable men how to place upon record, faithfully and accurately, what each remembered of incidents and conversations to which, for several years, they had been eye and ear witnesses. Indeed there is some risk of falling into grave error if we take a different view of this matter; for the Evangelists are not always agreed as to what did occur on certain memorable occasions. Now, if four men who write are the mere organs through which God speaks, they cannot but write, word for word, the same thing; whereas, if they trust to their own recollection of events as these were witnessed by or reported to them, their common testimony is rendered more valuable—



certainly not less so—because of the slight contrarieties which may be discoverable in the details of facts as they severally describe them. Without, therefore, presuming to say that the Gospels were compiled without any guidance more unerring than that which, under ordinary circumstances, directs the truth-loving historian in his work, we should damage the cause which, as believers, we seek to promote, were we to claim even for the Evangelists plenary inspiration. Wherever he has the Lord's moral and religious teaching to set forth, there, we may depend upon it, the Evangelist writes as the Divine Spirit directs him. Wherever he has occurrences to describe, such as the healing of the sick, or the Lord's progresses from place to place, or the incidents that attended the crucifixion and the resurrection—each gives a faithful transcript of the impressions that were made upon him at the moment, and remained ever after stamped upon his memory.

Again, it is impossible to read the Epistles in an unprejudiced frame of mind without perceiving that the same canon of criticism which is applicable to the Pentateuch and to the Gospels applies to them. That the writers of these letters were deeply imbued with a conviction of the speedy return of their Lord to judge the world is past dispute. It is equally certain that they strove to impress this conviction upon the converts, and that they succeeded in doing so ; yet

the event has long ago falsified their conclusions. We find, also, that on more than one occasion the principles both of doctrine and discipline enforced by St Paul scarcely agree in all respects with those advocated by St Peter and St James. And we further find St Paul carefully guarding himself against being supposed to speak with the authority of an inspired man, when he suggests to his correspondents the expediency of keeping themselves as much as possible untrammelled by family ties. For these and other reasons, such as the introduction of legends of which we cannot trace the source, and the occasional misapplication of old prophecy, we may without offence come to the conclusion that here, as well as elsewhere in the Scriptures of the New Testament, the Spirit of God speaks with no uncertain sound only where the great moral and religious truths revealed by Christ Jesus are enunciated and enforced. Whenever the writers, whether of the Gospels, or the book of the Acts, or of the Epistles, diverge into other topics, they are guided solely by that love of truth which, though it be actively inherent in all honest men, is not of necessity accompanied by such an amount of knowledge as shall render it impossible for them to fall into mistakes.

III. But granting this view of the case to be admissible in the abstract, are we not met at the outset of our attempt to deal with it in the concrete by an

insurmountable difficulty ? What evidence is there to show that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are authentic ? In other words, are you prepared to assign to each separate treatise its distinct authorship, and to prove that the writer was contemporary with the events which he records, and personally cognisant of them ? We answer that the objection here raised does not present itself in a formidable light to us ; indeed we cannot discover in it any real difficulty at all. Who would ever think of demanding that the compiler of Hansard should be identified before the authenticity of speeches delivered in Parliament five years, or ten years, or twenty years ago, could be admitted ? Does anybody call in question the authenticity of the Saxon Chronicles, or of Domesday Book, or of the Great Charter, because he is unable to determine positively by whose hand these several documents were compiled ? And is it more reasonable to contend that because we cannot assign to the Books of Chronicles and Kings any specific authorship, and perhaps distrust the evidence which would connect the names of Samuel, and Joshua, and Moses with the older books as we now read them, we are therefore driven to conclude that none of them are authentic—that they are fables invented at a later age, and for purposes of priestcraft palmed off upon an ignorant people as veritable history ? Indeed we have not, in thus stating our case, stated it fairly.

Hansard is invaluable as preserving a correct record of the proceedings of Parliament from session to session, and the Saxon Chronicles furnish materials for history, though all who consult them are aware that they emanate from no authoritative source. But the Books of Chronicles and Kings, and probably those, also, which in our English version stand as the two Books of Samuel, are transcripts from the official records of a nation ; at all events they have certainly been treated as such as far back as Jewish memory extends. The same thing may be said of the Book of Joshua. It is a journal of the conquest of Canaan, at least as credible, if regarded in that light, as the Annals of Tacitus or the narrative of the Jugurthine War by Sallust. And as to the Pentateuch, it matters very little whether we receive it as coming direct from the hand of Moses, or as a work compiled at some later period from trustworthy documents. The only important point to be determined is this—Was Moses a real character in history, or is he but a myth like Hercules, or Pygmalion, or any other name round which wondrous stories cluster themselves ? There cannot, we think, be two opinions on this head. If the evidence which vouches for any fact in ages past be conclusive, it is that which testifies to the life and labours of Moses ; and at the risk of partially repeating what has been said elsewhere, we shall here endeavour briefly to summarise it.

We have already declined, and we decline again, to inquire into the exact chronological dates of the more ancient of the books which in their present form make up the canon of the Old Testament.\* Fix these as you may, whether with modern inquirers under the reign of King Josiah, or, as our old divines maintain, at the period of the Exodus itself, in either case their teaching is the same. They describe a state of society without a parallel in any age and any portion of the world with which we are acquainted. That the religious opinions and social habits of the Israelites were the outcome of the Mosaic institutions is a truth which no one has ever called in question. And as little can it be questioned that the same sentiments and doctrines which were professed among them at the period of the final dispersion, had been their rule of life ever since they became a nation. For nobody pretends to say that the Law, with its multifarious rites and ordinances, came into force for the first time under the good King Josiah. The most determined impugnors of its antiquity admit this—that out of records, dating from a period long anterior to the reign of Josiah, the Pentateuch must have been compiled. And so long as we have

\* To our minds, the evidence in favour of the early composition of the Pentateuch is conclusive. Would any writer, concocting a law for a people dwelling in cities, direct them to provide for the cleanliness of a camp, or describe elaborately the form of the tent in which they were to perform their most sacred rites?



these records to fall back upon, and the prevalence admitted of customs, and a belief, in conformity with the customs and belief which in the Pentateuch are pronounced to be national, we have ample proof that Moses, to whom, from age to age, the introduction of these national customs is referred, was a real historical character.

Having settled this point, we go on to ask what the purposes could have been which the author of the Pentateuch, or of the documents on which it is founded, had in view when he compiled the work which has come down to us ? The answer is, that his direct purposes must have been twofold : First, to frame and establish a law which should render next to impossible the permanent lapse of his people into the polytheism which everywhere prevailed around them ; and next, so to describe their national origin as that the main precept in his law should be represented as resting upon an authority far higher than appertains to any merely human edict. This latter purpose he effects in the Books of Genesis and Exodus. The former he strives to attain in the Books of Leviticus and Numbers. The Book of Deuteronomy, as its title denotes, aims at nothing more than a recapitulation in a condensed form of all that had been told elsewhere. Whether it be of the same date as the other four, is therefore a matter not worth one moment's serious consideration. But

this is not all. Moses, or the compiler who throws ancient records into shape, makes both his historical and his didactic teaching subservient to ends still more beneficent than the moral training of his own people. He indicates, not obscurely, that everything that is done for them is done likewise for the benefit of the world at large. The head of the house of Israel—the source whence the Jewish commonwealth sprang—is commanded to leave his kindred and his father's house, not alone in order that God may make of him a great nation, but that “in his seed all the families of the earth may be blessed.” The historian and lawgiver who records this fact, records likewise this solemn warning for his people : “The Lord your God will raise up unto you another prophet like unto me ; to him ye must give heed.” Now it is past dispute that Jesus Christ applied to Himself and to the religion which He was founding both of these records ; and it is not less certain that the influence for good which Christianity has exercised, and continues to exercise, in its progress through the world, more than testifies to the correctness of such application. Why is it that among enlightened Asiatics we find a growing anxiety to explain that their old religions, when stripped of modern corruptions, are not the degraded and degrading superstitions which superficial observers represent them to be ? And if Mohammedanism still keep its ground, and, accord-

ing to recent reports, be even spreading into the darker places of Africa, whence comes that modification of character which is perceptible in many of its votaries, making their governments, as in Egypt, tolerant of other creeds, and individuals fair, not unfrequently liberal, in their dealings with such as profess these creeds? The one cause of this moral revolution which has passed over many lands, and is passing by degrees over the whole world, must be sought for, and will be found, in the quiet change which Christianity is working in the sentiments of all who come in contact with it. For Christianity it is which has softened the manners and elevated the tastes of nations, in a ratio proportionate to the simple purity in which they have embraced it. The teachers of Christianity wherever they go, Christian Governments wherever they are established, introduce, both among heathens and Mohammedans, as much of this refinement as puts to shame the open licentiousness and ferocious cruelty which are the disgrace and characteristics as well of Mohammedanism as of heathenism. And Mohammedans and heathens alike, inoculated by little and little with the principles laid down in Christian literature and by Christian example, come in the end to approve, if they do not always practise, the ethics of a religion which they still refuse to embrace. It is thus, rather than in the general acceptance of dogmas, about the

right interpretation of which professing Christians are not themselves agreed, that the prophecy obtains its fulfilment, which pointed long ago to a time coming, when "the knowledge of the Lord should cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea." Surely, then, no thoughtful man, looking at results so grand, being satisfied that it is the spirit of Christianity which is humanising by degrees all the nations of the earth, and being further satisfied that the relationship between Christianity and Judaism is so intimate, that the one without the other must have been impossible, —surely no thoughtful man, convinced of these truths, and they are irrefragable, will ever treat the literature of the Hebrews otherwise than with profound respect. But the literature of the Hebrews is nothing worth if you eliminate from it the colossal figure of him who may be described as its source and origin, just as he was the founder of the commonwealth which it so largely contributed to hold together.

Will the old objection be repeated, that it is idle to expect from the men of this generation any belief at all in the credibility of a historian, who—whether in a consecutive narrative written by himself, or by literary fragments passed on to some age beyond his own, and by unknown hands cast into shape—describes the creation of the world, and the condition of primitive society, as we find these matters set forth in the Book of Genesis? And shall we further be reminded

that the guidance of the Israelites by a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, the issue of water from the rock when smitten by Moses' rod, and such-like, as they are stories fit only to be told in the nursery, and credited by its inmates, so they strike at the root of all faith in the trustworthiness of the Book which records them ? It may be so ; but in this case we can only repeat in substance what has already been stated in detail. The fact vouched for by Stow is undoubtedly questionable, that in "January 1206, about Maidstone in Kent, a certain monster was found, stricken by lightning, which had a head like an ass, a belly like a man, and all other parts far discordant from any one living thing." Yet no one doubts that the quarrel between the Pope and King John, which the same chronicler records, actually took place ; or that the interdict which shut up all the churches in England was issued, as he informs us, on the 2d March, in this same year. In like manner, you may find it difficult to believe that the daily march of the Israelites was guided literally by a pillar of cloud, and their nightly halts and movements controlled by a pillar of fire. But can you doubt the reality of the march itself, or of its consequences ? So, likewise, you may find it hard to perceive a miracle in the discovery of a hidden stream of water, at a moment when a nomadic people are on the eve of perishing of thirst. But you will



scarcely contend that the phenomenon was physically impossible. Much more reasonable is the view of the case taken by one whom few will charge either with excess of superstition or its opposite. "Ancient words and ancient thoughts," says Max Müller—"for both go together in the Old Testament—have not yet arrived at that stage of abstraction, in which, for instance, active powers, whether natural or supernatural, can be represented in any but a personal and more or less human form. When we speak of a temptation from within, or from without, it was more natural for the ancients to speak of a tempter, whether in a human or in an animal form. When we speak of the ever-present help of God, they call the Lord their rock and their fortress, their buckler and their high tower. They even speak of the Rock that begat them (Deut. xxxii. 18), though in a very different sense from that in which Homer speaks of the rock from whence man has sprung. What with us is a heavenly message, or a godsend, was to them a winged messenger. What we call divine guidance, they speak of as a pillar of a cloud to lead them the way, and a pillar of light to give them light—a refuge from the storm, and a shadow from the heat. What is really meant is, no doubt, the same; and the fault is ours, not theirs, if we wilfully misinterpret the language of ancient prophets. If we persist in understanding their words in their outward and material

aspect only, and forget that before language had sanctioned a distinction between the concrete and the abstract—between the purely spiritual as opposed to the coarsely material—the intentions of the speakers comprehended both the concrete and the abstract, both the material and the spiritual, in a manner which has become quite strange to us, though it lives on in the language of every true poet. Unless we make allowance for this mental parallax, all our readings in the ancient skies will be, and must be, erroneous. Nay, I believe it can be proved, that more than half of the difficulties in the history of religious thought owe their origin to this constant misinterpretation of ancient language by modern language—of ancient thought by modern thought.”

Bearing these facts in mind—for facts they unquestionably are,—the most conscientious believer will hardly refuse to his less stable brother the privilege—if privilege it deserve to be called—of regarding the Book of Genesis less as a narrative of facts occurring exactly as they are set down, than as an account of the beginnings of things, so put together as to keep constantly before the eyes of the Jewish people the one great truth round which all other truths are made to revolve. According to this view of the case, the entire Pentateuch may be considered as much a protest against polytheism, and the debasing rights of a sensuous idolatry, as are the commandments

which forbid the making of a graven image, or the likening of the Supreme to anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. We know that as their mental culture increased, the more thoughtful among the people, for whose use the books were compiled, saw the matter in this light. And we further know that they, not less than we, see in them a great deal more. The beautiful story of the paradisiac state, for example, with its absolute innocence, its profound simplicity, was no Jewish version of the fable of the golden age to them, any more than it is to us. They recognised under this figure, just as we Christians do, a deep mystery, towards the elucidation of which every event in their national history was contributing; and if, when the solution came, their rulers failed to recognise the fact, it was because an exaggerated national pride blinded them to the purpose towards which their own and the special training of their ancestors had all along been directed.

## CHAPTER V.

DOUBT IN REGARD TO MIRACLES NO JUST REASON FOR DISCREDITING  
THE GRAND DETAILS AND OBVIOUS DESIGN OF JEWISH HISTORY—  
THE APOSTASIES OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE NO ARGUMENT AGAINST  
THE THEOCRACY—THE HEBREW CONSTITUTION—IMPERFECT CON-  
QUEST OF PALESTINE—THE BOOK OF JUDGES THE HEROIC AGE OF  
ISRAEL—THE SEVERANCE OF THE TRIBES INTO TWO KINGDOMS  
INTERFERES IN NO RESPECT WITH THE PURPOSE OF ABRAHAM'S  
CALL.

IF it be allowed to seekers after truth, the focus of whose mental vision is not in every respect identical with our own, thus to read what is written in the Pentateuch, without violating that charity which is the very bond of peace, the danger of an open rupture between us will become continually less as we go forward with our study of the rest of the treatises which make up the canon of the Old Testament. For besides that in this, as in other cases, miracles become rare in proportion as our narrative carries us into times more historical than legendary, we must never forget that to the last we have to do with ancient thought, expressed in ancient language, of which modern thought and modern language are often but

indifferent interpreters. Still, in spite of this hindrance to a perfect adaptation of our views to those entertained several thousand years ago by an oriental people, it is impossible to watch the course of events without being satisfied that, subject to various obstructions, its current in Jewish history sets steadily towards a great consummation. You may put little confidence in special predictions, hidden, as not a few of them are, beneath a cloud of allegory ; you may even object to many as misapplied, and obviously misapplied, to serve a purpose : but you can scarcely deny that, from the call of Abraham down to the final dispersion, the minds of the Jewish people were more or less imbued with a conviction that from among them Jehovah would sooner or later raise up a Prince, who should give the law to the whole world. That this conviction made itself less conspicuous previously to the Babylonish captivity than subsequently to that event, is perfectly true. Only the higher intellects, indeed—such as spoke in the sublime poetry of the Psalms and the prophets—might, in the earlier stage of the nation's existence, catch the true meaning of the Mosaic assurance, and the still more explicit promise made to the illustrious man from whom they traced their common descent. But of the universal prevalence of this belief subsequently to the return from Babylon, and its perpetually increasing intensity



as the fulness of time drew near, no impartial student of history can entertain a doubt.

But it may be asked, "What do you gain by your point, supposing it to be conceded?" There are such things as national, as well as family and personal delusions; and this particular expectation was clearly a delusive one, inasmuch as the Prince expected by the Jews has not yet arrived, and in all human probability will never make his appearance. Meanwhile, how is it proposed to reconcile the constant apostasies of the chosen people with the fact that they lived under a theocracy; and, by a succession of miraculous interferences, were, from time to time, reminded of their high privileges and the terrible consequences of slighting them? We answer that, in point of fact, you present to us no antagonistic elements of controversy to be reconciled. It is past dispute that, whatever philosophers of the nineteenth century may think of the claims of the Mosaic law to be regarded as divinely inspired, the people to whom it was given never called its divine origin in question. It is equally past dispute that, from first to last, they bore its requirements as a burden, and embraced every opportunity of escaping from them. Why? First, because they were men; and men, as our own personal experience may teach us, in every age and in every country, too often postpone to self-indulgence, when temptation

comes, the requirements of duty. And next, the Israelites were, in more senses of the term than one, a peculiar people. Born and brought up in slavery—barbarous even for the period in which they lived—some thousands, or it may be hundreds of thousands, of persons are, by the surpassing genius of one man, moulded into the form of a nation. The only power to which they are capable of submitting their own will as individuals is that of force ; and the most effective shape which, with such as they, force can assume, is superstition. But superstition—read the term as you will, whether as signifying the craven fear of imaginary demons, or holy reverence for the one true God—operates on rude natures only so long as some visible or tangible tokens of its producing causes are present with them. Hence the elaborate care which the Jewish lawgiver took to make every incident in the daily life of his people—their food, their dress, their system of agriculture, the tenure by which they held their lands, &c.—subservient to the one great purpose of reminding them at all times, and under all circumstances, that they were not as the neighbouring nations were ; that they were the servants and subjects of Jehovah.

Wise as these arrangements were, they nevertheless failed, for obvious reasons, to counteract the influences which in process of time threw themselves, so to speak, into the opposite scale. So long

as the Israelites dwelt apart from other tribes—throughout their forty years' sojourn in the wilderness—their apostasies were neither numerous nor general. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram might conspire to set aside the leadership of Moses, just as, at an earlier stage in their march, Aaron was prevailed upon, during the absence of his brother, to make for the people a visible emblem of the God "which brought them up out of the land of Egypt." But neither in the one case nor in the other can it be said that there was apostasy from the allegiance due to Jehovah, inasmuch as the casting of the golden calf took place ere the written law was given, and the rebellion of the Korites was against Moses, not against God. The case is different when this rude and sensuous people, after a prolonged seclusion from intercourse with other peoples, come suddenly in contact with races more polished, and even more sensuous, than themselves. Remember that the Moabites, the Midianites, and the other clans which occupied the districts lying on either side of the Jordan, were, like the Israelites, of Shemitic descent. They spoke a language which differed not more from the ancient Hebrew than one dialect of ancient Greek differs from another ; and voluptuous and demoralising as their religion had become, it was still based upon the worship of the Supreme Being, recognised alike among them and their invaders, and addressed by a name

in its root common to both. Truce with nations so circumstanced could not fail to be infinitely more dangerous to the stability of a commonwealth based upon a pure monotheism, than war. Hence the command of the chief of the invading force to hold no friendly intercourse with the invaded, but to drive them out absolutely and entirely, giving no quarter to prisoners, but forcing all to seek safety in emigration. It was a stern order, though not more stern than the necessities of the case required. The maintenance of the worship of the one true God—elaborate in its details, yet simple and purifying in its essence—was incompatible with intermarriages between the Israelites and the more civilised polytheists against whom their arms were directed. This the illustrious founder of the nation well understood ; and against the occurrence of the evil he took every precaution which it was possible to take ; but he knew also that events are stronger than the strongest human will, and, with words of melancholy warning on his lips, he died. “I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you ; and evil will befall you in the latter days ; because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger.”

There is little in the Book of Joshua, or, indeed, in any of the remaining historical books of the Old Testament, which, in accordance with the plan of these

essays, demands special notice. As has already been said, we have in the Book of Joshua a journal of the conquest of Canaan, the general credibility of which will scarcely be disputed, whatever views the reader may take of the marvels with which it is interspersed. These, after all, are neither very numerous nor out of character with the spirit of the age nor of the language which describes them. The passage of the Jordan, for example, the capture of Jericho, and the vision which encouraged Joshua to go forward with his military operations, are all set forth in terms which may receive one interpretation or another, without in the smallest degree affecting the trustworthiness of the main history. And as to the standing-still of the sun and moon, may not the text of Scripture itself point to the true source of the legend ? “Is not this written in the Book of Jasher ?” “I have no scruple,” says Dean Milman, “in avowing my opinion that it is pure poetry. It is given as a quotation from the Book of Jasher. The Book of Jasher is twice cited—here and in 2d Samuel, i. 18. Both passages are clearly and distinctly metrical. There can be no doubt, I think, that Jasher was a book of pure poetry—a book of odes, hymns, or brief narrative poems. It is remarkable that to this miracle, certainly the most stupendous of all, there is no allusion in the poetic books of the Old Testament. The Psalms and other poems are full of lofty reminiscences of the incidents of the Exodus and



the conquest, the overthrow of Pharaoh and his host, the passage of the Red Sea, the fall of Og the king of Bashan, and other defeated princes." But, except in the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus, no allusion whatever is anywhere made to an incident which, had it been regarded as historically true, could hardly have failed to find a place among the wondrous interventions of Providence in favour of their forefathers, which supplied Hebrew bards from generation to generation with materials for the most sublime of their poems.

The space of time embraced by the Book of Judges has been well described as the heroic age of the Hebrews. The great man who established their nationality was not more remarkable for his transcendent genius, than for his entire freedom from personal ambition. The father of sons, and wielding absolute power, based as much upon the love as upon the reverence of the people, he neither asserted his own right to assume kingly state, nor made the slightest movement towards founding a dynasty which should perpetuate his name. One aim, and only one, was his—to create a republic, or rather a confederation of twelve republics, the bond of union among which should be their common allegiance to the great Being of whom he taught them to think as at once their temporal sovereign and their God. In order to keep them steadfast in this latter faith, he set up in the midst of the camp a tabernacle or movable temple, within which should

go on continually sacrifice and worship to Jehovah, and in or round which, at stated seasons, all, or representatives from the whole of the tribes, should assemble. For the service of this temple he appointed a priesthood ; but between his priesthood and that of other nations there was this marked difference, that his, though taken exclusively from one tribe, and in its higher dignities from one family, never became, like the priesthoods of the Egyptians and Hindus, a privileged, much less a dominant caste. On the contrary, the duties of the priest in Israel were purely sacrificial. The office secured for him a place in society honourable and commanding respect ; but it established no right to govern apart from such claims as his own personal ability might advance. Samuel, no doubt, was of priestly descent, educated in the temple, and trained to execute priestly offices. But he became supreme ruler in Israel, while another held the high priest's dignity, solely because he was the ablest and truest man of his generation. And if on the Levites devolved duties requiring for their proper performance comparative exemption from physical toil, it was because they had no distinct inheritance provided for them in the promised land ; but being specially educated, and scattered among the other tribes, whose business was mainly agriculture and war, they became to their countrymen in general, not copyists and expounders of the law alone, but likewise

schoolmasters and physicians. The Levitical priesthood was thus eminently useful in guiding the people's devotions exclusively towards the one true God, though the priests themselves were as much subordinate as the rest of the community to the chief of the state from whatever tribe descended. Moses, though a Levite by lineage, can hardly be described as a priest; Joshua, the son of Nun, was an Ephraimite; Othniel was of the tribe of Judah; Gideon, a Manassite; and Jephthah, from the trans-Jordanic province of Gilead. All these in succession, and many others, ere yet the form of government became regal, stood forward, or were chosen from time to time, as emergencies arose, to guide the counsels of the nation, and command its armies.

While thus providing for the due celebration of monotheistic worship, Moses gave authority to magistrates and judges in every tribe to administer a law, of which the enactments ran in the name of the same great Being to whom divine honours were paid. Nor was provision made for the slightest change in the character of this law down to the end of time. Whether his jurisdiction extended over a thousand, over a hundred, over fifty, or over ten,—whether the case submitted to him for decision was criminal or civil,—the Hebrew judge had no power to step aside from the regulations laid down in the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. It seems difficult, at first sight,

to conceive how a people thus hedged in with ordinances should have been induced under any circumstances to exchange the pure faith and worship of their fathers for the idolatries which they were commissioned to extirpate. But a moment's consideration given to the subject will show that their conduct in this respect is not to be wondered at; that it was, so to speak, the natural consequence of the mistakes that were committed by those who assigned to them their settlements in the promised land.

The authority of Joshua appears to have been as absolute as that of Moses himself. We hear of no apostasies during his lifetime, nor during the lives of the rulers who served under him. But he lacked the firmness of his great predecessor, and allowed the tribes to occupy and settle down on their respective allotments before the work of expelling the ancient inhabitants was completed. The arrangement proved fatal to the immediate development of the Mosaic policy. No sooner was the hand of power withdrawn from them than the several tribes, forgetful that in union lay their strength, began to think less of the common weal than of their separate convenience. They were all weary of war, and, like men so circumstanced, overlooked the fact that peace may be purchased at too dear a price. Those in the south—Judah and Benjamin in particular—may be said to have shared their lands with the aborigines; for the

Jebusites kept possession of the strong fortress of Sion, and dominated from it the surrounding districts. Almost all the plain stretching along the coast of the Mediterranean the Philistines continued to occupy ; and in other directions, the Canaanites, though defeated in the field, were permitted, on payment of tribute, to abide in their own cities and cultivate their own fields. The consequence was a gradual breaking down of the antipathies of race. The conquerors began to hold friendly relations with the vanquished ; and intermarriages soon followed, leading by little and little to community of religious worship. The Israelites strayed without reluctance into the shady groves where the voluptuous rites of the Canaanites were held, and attended and took part in their gay and brilliant festivals. There followed upon this a gradual incorporation of the two religions, whereby the Israelites soon learned to pay indiscriminate homage to the symbolic representations of the powers of Nature, and to their own peculiar God, the Creator of the universe. Nor were other and scarcely less fatal consequences wanting. In allying themselves thus with their Canaanitish neighbours, the tribes learned to stand apart one from the other. The great national gatherings beside the tabernacle at Shiloh were neglected, and internecine wars broke out. It is of this state of anarchy, originating in causes neither far to seek nor hard to



be understood, that the Book of Judges gives a poetical and highly graphic account.

The heroic age produces, wherever its annals are committed to writing, giants whose feats of strength far surpass those of ordinary men. What Hercules was in the legends of ancient Greece, Samson is represented to have been in the traditional history of the ancient Hebrews. The heroic age is fertile also in legends, which represent warriors encouraged by gods and goddesses to enter upon perilous undertakings, or warned to avoid them. Heavenly messengers direct Gideon and Jephthah to deliver their countrymen from the heathen oppressor; and they succeed, because, even to the most minute details, they follow a divine guidance in arranging their order of battle. Now it is preposterous to urge that because Samson's exploits seem to you to be ridiculous, and the stories of Gideon's fleece and of Jephtha's vow incredible, you are therefore justified in putting from you all belief in the special mission of the people among whom these things are said to have occurred. Though you read Homer's *Iliad* not as history but as poetry, you do not discredit either the growth or the services to mankind of the Greek republics. Why, then, because of these legends, if legends you are determined to regard them, should you refuse your assent to a truth, on which they have, in point of fact, no bearing, as evidence either for or against it? You can

scarcely doubt that such men as Samson, Gideon, and Jephthah existed ; and if very much of what we read about them be only the embodiment of stories passed on from mouth to mouth in a dark age, is the main stream of Hebrew history thereby seriously polluted ? Surely not. There was anarchy in the land till Samuel came to the front ; and even his transcendent ability failed to restore order on the old line of a federation of republics. The affairs of a nation beset with enemies from within and from without, can be successfully conducted only by an individual who shall unite in his own person the qualities both of a great statesman and a great soldier. This fact the people are taught by years of suffering to recognise, and they demand that a king shall be set over them.

That Samuel was unwilling to yield to this demand is very certain. Not that in the law any precept can be found either favourable or adverse to the establishment of a monarchical form of government in Israel. On that head the law is altogether silent, though the inevitable occurrence of the incident seems to have been present to the mind of the great lawgiver.\* But partly, perhaps, because of that disinclination which is natural in the best of men to subordinate

\* "The Lord shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known."—Deut. xxviii. 36.

his own authority once acquired to that of another ; partly because he may have been apprehensive that an hereditary chief magistrate might be less easily restrained within the lines of a written law than an elective one—Samuel not only expressed himself adverse to the proposed arrangement, but charged the people with a desire to throw off their allegiance to Jehovah. Events were, however, too strong for him. A succession of disastrous defeats had convinced the tribes that unless held together by a stronger hand than that of an aged priest there could be no security for them, and their united voices prevailed. To Samuel it was left to make choice of the man who should henceforth rule over all Israel—not as the kings of the Gentiles ruled, with power to make and unmake laws at pleasure, with or without the advice of his counsellors, but in strict conformity with the constitution which Jehovah, by the hand of Moses, had given to His own people ; in other words, as the vicegerent or representative of the Divine Majesty.

Such, and no more, were the powers conferred with regal state and title upon Saul ; and never till the final dissolution of the monarchy did the constitutional rights of the sovereign extend beyond them. For a forgetfulness of this fact—for a direct attack, indeed, upon the religion of the state—in assuming the priestly office and offering sacrifice, Saul was rejected ; and neither David nor Solomon, nor the

most powerful and upright of their successors, ever spoke of himself otherwise than as the ruler over God's people.

The monarchy had not passed into more than three hands ere the mutual jealousies of the tribes began to revive. The harsh and imprudent conduct of the grandson of David drove ten of them into revolt; and henceforth, within the limits of Palestine, we see coexisting two distinct and often hostile monarchies. Yet are the nations but one people to the end—one in the recognition of the Mosaic law as their common rule of life—one in their monotheistic worship, though often led by their governments into violation of the former, and general apostasy from the latter. Without presumption, therefore, it may be said that from the date of the establishment of monarchy among them, the history of the Israelites is that of a nation among whom natural causes produce their natural effects. Wise princes govern wisely, and their peoples prosper; foolish princes govern foolishly, and their peoples suffer. No doubt we read here and there, as in the earlier records of the nation, of marvellous interferences with the course of events by gifted men. Prophets have still much to say in the conduct of public affairs, and a few of the order perform miracles. But here, again, we must bear in mind that the government, both in Judah and Israel, was a theocracy, and that ancient

thought expressed in ancient language cannot be literally transferred to modern thought speaking through modern language. There is nothing incredible in the statement that Nathan spoke to David the parable of the ewe-lamb; or that a pestilence fell upon the land, which the penitent monarch regarded as the punishment of his own great sin. But the destroying angel whom David beheld stretching out his sword over Jerusalem may have been, and doubtless was, just such an angel as the Jews of our Lord's day saw when the water in the pool of Siloam was troubled. In like manner we must distrust universal history if we doubt that Elijah dared all and did much to cope with idolatry in Israel during the infamous reign of Ahab. The means by which he achieved his first success over the priests of Baal may somewhat tax our powers of belief, not less than the literal supply by ravens of bread and meat, and the endurance for many months of the handful of meal in a barrel and the cruse of oil. But whether accepted in their simplicity, or read as great truths hidden under metaphorical language, these particular narratives neither add to nor take away from the value to the world at large of the history in which they are incorporated. That history we cannot treat with too much respect. At every stage in it the hand of God is visible. Writers or speakers may attribute to Him passions and prejudices which are their own. They may



represent Him as loving Israel and hating all the world besides—as employing spiritual beings to fight for His own people—as looking with favour upon acts which we of this generation should denounce as treacherous or cruel. All this certainly proves that they who were constrained, throughout ages of religious confusion elsewhere, to be the sole repositories of pure monotheism, understood neither the true nature of Him who was the object of their worship, nor the part which they themselves were playing in His government of the world. But it detracts in no degree from the importance of the task which was assigned to them, much less flings a shadow over the perfect wisdom of a plan which, without violating a single law or attribute of humanity, made man the instrument of his own moral regeneration, just as he had previously been the instrument of his own moral corruption.

## CHAPTER VI.

BRIEF RECAPITULATION—OBVIOUS DESIGN IN JEWISH HISTORY—MODE OF ARRIVING AT JUST CONCLUSIONS RESPECTING THE TRUE OBJECT OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION—HOW THE SCRIPTURES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT ARE TO BE READ—DOUBTS HAVE BEEN THROWN ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE FIRST TWO CHAPTERS OF ST MATTHEW—ST MARK A CONVERT AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION—ST LUKE A GENTILE BY BIRTH—ST JOHN—HIS GOSPEL, AND THE CAUSES OF ITS COMPOSITION—THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES—ARE THESE WRITINGS AUTHENTIC ?—PROOFS OF THEIR AUTHENTICITY.

THUS far, as it appears to us, the ground on which we have been treading may be safely trodden by thinkers of every school, provided only they agree upon two fundamental principles, the rejection of which must of course prove fatal to all moral reasoning on a subject so recondite. It must be admitted, first, that “the things which are seen proceed from that which is unseen ;” and next, that “a perfectly wise and beneficent Creator cannot but govern the world of mind by laws which, in their spirit and tendency, are analogous to those by which He governs the world of matter.” Admit these two postulates, and the process by which all races and nations

have been subjected to a systematic religious training becomes obvious and perfectly intelligible. You may, if such be your pleasure, put as little confidence in the miracles attributed to Moses and Elijah as you do in those claimed for Zoroaster and Buddha. But you cannot set aside the fact, that over the destinies of mankind the Mosaic dispensation has exercised a far greater influence for good, not only than the religious dispensations which came from Zoroaster and Buddha, but than all the other dispensations put together which have been offered to the world. We express ourselves thus because Christianity, though immeasurably superior to the Levitical law, is in one sense only a development of that law. Without the preparation made for it in the Mosaic dispensation, Christianity could have had no existence. "I came," says Christ Himself, "not to abolish the law, but to fulfil." "The law," says St Paul, "was the school-master to bring us to Christ." Now, if men be indeed God's handiwork, receiving from Him every faculty, both of body and mind, which they possess, we surely claim for the great man who framed this law no more than his due when we say that the Author of all good conferred on him a larger measure of inspiration than was granted to the most favoured of his generation ; in other words, that his knowledge of divine truth, and his wisdom in controlling the wills of men, far surpassed those of any other person of whom ancient

history makes mention. We may claim also for the prophets who, in after-times of apostasy and trial, stood forth to vindicate the authority of the law, that, so far as they laboured to achieve that end, they likewise obeyed the motions of God's Holy Spirit. And finally, as to the evidences of design in all that befell the chosen people—in their prosperity so long as they lived in the spirit of the Mosaic law, in the misfortunes which overtook them as often as they departed from it, in their removal as captives to Babylon, in their return to their own land, and in their varied fortunes subsequently to that event—he must be either very prejudiced or very blind who fails to perceive that these are stamped on each successive stage in their eventful history as it occurs. Indeed we will go farther. The selection for their home as a nation of a country geographically situated as Palestine is, proves that both in its immediate and in its remote consequences theirs was no ordinary migration, but that, both in its progress and its issue, the emigrants were guided by a wisdom which worked less for their special benefit than for the benefit of the world at large. Separated from the great empires of Egypt and Assyria by deserts, mountain-chains, and an arm of the sea, and thus securing for them at the outset that isolation which was essential to the full growth of the Mosaic polity, Palestine yet lay, so to speak, in the highway of nations, and proved to be the battle-ground

on which, when the times became ripe, Eastern and Western civilisation encountered one another and struggled for the ascendancy. All this, and the object of it, seem to us clear as the sun at noonday—as clear as the early rise and steady growth of the national expectation, that whatever calamities might overtake them, a Messiah or Anointed Leader would present himself when their fortunes were at the lowest, and establish in the house of David a kingdom which should endure to the end of the world. That this expectation achieved its accomplishment in Christ Jesus—by whom a kingdom was founded, which, beginning at Jerusalem, has extended, and will continue to extend, till it embrace the whole earth—we Christians believe. It remains to be seen whether it be possible to commend this universal creed of Christendom to the acceptance of men willing, perhaps even anxious, to embrace it, yet repelled by the apparent impossibility of reconciling much that they read in the New Testament, and still more of what has been deduced from it, not only with the well-known and established laws of nature, but with the working of the devotional spirit within themselves. For they believe in God humbly, profoundly; they believe also in a superintending providence, and would fain believe in the reality of that future state of which Christianity speaks. But it comes before them, through the ordinary channels of religious thought, in a light



repellent rather than attractive ; and to the great Author of all things, the Creator of heaven and earth, they dare not assign, with ancient councils and modern confessions of faith, any specific mode either of existence or of operation. We feel that the attempt to solve this problem is beset with enormous difficulties ; yet we do not despair of finding a way through them, provided, in those to whom we address ourselves, the love of truth is stronger than prejudice—whether it be the child of early education, or the growth of more matured, though perhaps still very erratic, thought.

We should but repeat what was said in a former essay were we to notice the antagonism which is assumed to exist between certain statements in the New Testament and the well-known and established laws of nature. The laws of nature which are familiar to us affect only the material universe ; but forasmuch as these emanate from an all-wise and beneficent Lawgiver, it would be absurd, as well as impious, to deny that with Him rests the power of reversing or suspending them, as often as by so doing benefits are to be conferred upon His still higher and more important universe—the world of mind. Miracles, therefore, though generally to be discredited, are not impossible ; and by every reflecting theist they will be accepted or rejected quite as much according to the importance of the purpose which they are intended to serve, as to the weight of the testimony

which vouches for them. The resurrection of our Lord from the dead is one of these miracles. As has elsewhere been explained, by no other process could the reality of a future state, in all its essential conditions analogous to the present, yet freed from its shortcomings, be brought home to the convictions of high and low, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, the child and the up-grown man, alike. And if it be necessary to the moral regeneration of the world that men should learn to regard the life that now is as a preparation for a better, surely some firmer ground on which they may rest their faith must be provided than the vague surmises of speculative philosophers. Let that pass, however, for the present—the question having been argued at length elsewhere ; while we examine in a spirit of perfect candour the objections to Christianity—which rest upon what may without offence be called religious sentiment—and the ground for these objections.

It is absolutely necessary, while conducting an inquiry so important, to forget as far as possible that such things as the decrees of ancient councils and modern confessions of faith exist, and to confine our attention exclusively to two points—*i. e.*, the grounds on which we regard as authentic the volume which details the life and conversation of the great Founder of Christianity ; and the deductions which, as reasonable men, we are justified in drawing

from both. If the former can be satisfactorily established—if it can be proved that the records which have come down to us of Christ's public life were compiled, some of them by men in personal attendance on Himself, others by those who were His and their contemporaries—it seems impossible to doubt that they give upon the whole a true account of what was known or believed to have occurred during the space of time covered by their respective narratives. And if it can be further shown what the points really were on which Christ uniformly insisted, as well by references to His own discourses as by taking note of the views set forth and elaborated by His apostles, both in their oral teaching and in their letters, then it appears to us that there will be little difficulty in arriving at just conclusions respecting the true object of that religious system which thinkers of every school are unanimous in pronouncing to be the most perfect the world has ever seen. If we can agree cordially in this, you may differ from us in questions of abstract doctrine as much as you please ; and we Christians, so long as you state your objections in a becoming, and therefore reverential manner, will neither shun you in this life as enemies of your kind, nor speak of you as necessarily excluded from that purer and better life to which, because we are Christians, we look forward in the future.

And here, at the outset, we shall make certain con-

cessions which, to the less instructed among our readers, may seem perhaps to be uncalled for, but which every Biblical scholar knows to be unavoidable. In the first place, we do not claim for every book or treatise in the New Testament, as it is read in our churches, the same measure of authority. On the contrary, we accept the distribution which Eusebius \* has made of these writings into three classes : (1) books which in his day were of undoubted authority, being everywhere received in the Church as authentic ; (2) books of doubtful authenticity, though more generally received as authentic than the reverse ; and (3) books unquestionably spurious.

The books of undoubted authority are the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, all the Epistles of St Paul, the First Epistle of St Peter, and the First Epistle of St John. The Epistle to the Hebrews may likewise be classed in this category ; because, though there is no evidence to show that it was written by St Paul, its acceptance by the Church as an authoritative document during the apostolic age is undeniable. Under the second head the historian ranges the Epistles ascribed to St James and St Jude, the 2d of St Peter, and the 2d and 3d of St John, whether claiming to be written by the evangelist or by another person of the same name. Of the spurious documents all except one are excluded from our canon. They comprise

\* Hist. Eccles., lib. 3, c. xxv.

“ the History of Paul,” “ the Shepherd,” “ the Revelation of Peter,” “ the Epistle of Barnabas,” “ the Institutes of the Apostles,” and perhaps, likewise, the Revelation of St John.

In the next place, we are willing to admit that concerning the authenticity of the first two chapters of St Matthew's Gospel doubts have been entertained ; and that reasonable exception is taken both to the genealogy of Christ, as it is there set forth, and to the misuse which on more than one occasion is made of prophecy. That the doubts in question rest upon no very solid foundation is vouched for by the fact, that out of 355 old MSS. which have been collated only one is defective in this respect, and that from it, the Codex Ebnerianus, only the first chapter is wanting. As to the defective genealogy and the misuse of prophecy, these, if they be real, prove no more than that, when writing on matters with which he was not personally cognisant, the evangelist was liable to err. Finally, the question as to whether St Matthew wrote in the first instance in Syriac or in Greek, is one which in these days concerns us very little. The Syriac version would of course be intended for the special use of converts dwelling in Judea ; whereas the Greek translation, if a translation it be, was addressed to believers in all parts of the Roman world.

Again, we concede the point that St Mark and St Luke may not have been, as St Matthew and St John



undoubtedly were, personal followers of Christ. We hear for the first time of "John, whose surname was Mark," on the occasion when St Peter, conducted by the angel out of prison, betakes himself to the house of Mary—the hospitable doors of which appear to have been at all times open to the Christians dwelling in Jerusalem. This same Mark is again spoken of as attending St Paul and St Barnabas in their travels, and next as attaching himself to St Peter, who speaks of him as his son. But no mention whatever is made of him in connection with Christ Himself,\* either as one of the seventy, or even as an occasional follower. The tradition concerning him, therefore, and it is nothing more, amounts to this, that with his mother he became a convert to Christianity subsequently to the crucifixion; and that the materials for his life of Christ were derived mainly, if not entirely, from conversations with St Peter.

Of the precise period when his Gospel made its appearance, we cannot speak with any certainty. The stories, invented for an obvious purpose, and long credited in the Church, about St Peter's Roman episcopate extending over twenty-five years, and the circumstances which induced him to dictate to St Mark,

\* On this head all antiquity is agreed. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Irenæus tell the same tale; while Tertullian, in his treatise against Marcion, distinguishes St Mark and St Luke from St Matthew and St John by calling the two latter apostles, and the two former apostolic men.

then acting as his interpreter or secretary, no scholar outside the pale of modern Romanism would now repeat. Neither is the evidence which would fix the seat of the evangelist's labours at Alexandria one whit more satisfactory. The conclusion, therefore, to which we are led is this,—that while there is ample proof of the early recognition of St Mark's Gospel as a work of authority, based upon a persuasion that the writer derived his knowledge of the events therein recorded from St Peter, we are without data on which to determine either the exact date or the place of its compilation. Nor need we hesitate to make a still farther admission—viz., that in this case, as in that of St Matthew, doubts are entertained as to whether or no certain portions of the biography read in our churches came from the pen of St Mark, or were added at a later period by some unknown hand. We allude particularly to the last twelve verses of the concluding chapter, which are not to be found in the Codex Vaticanus—perhaps the most important Greek MS. now extant, and on the authenticity of which Eusebius appears to throw doubts. The point raised by this admission is not, however, of any real moment ; because St Mark's testimony to the resurrection, and indeed to every other incident in the career of Christ, can be taken only as evidence at second hand, unless indeed we fall in with the popular idea of inspiration, and believe that he was divinely illuminated to give a

perfectly accurate account of events to which he had no opportunity of becoming personally a witness.

From a passage in St Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (iv. 10, 11, 14), we gather that St Luke was not of the circumcision—in other words, was by birth a Gentile—a circumstance which sufficiently accounts for the difference of tone in his Gospel from that of the other evangelists. Of the date and circumstances of his conversion we know nothing, but he has himself informed us of his faithful attendance upon St Paul ; and St Paul writes of him in affectionate terms from Rome, both to the Colossians and to Philemon. He begins his Gospel with an honest confession that he is about to throw into order, not what he himself had heard and seen, but all that he had been able to collect concerning the Lord from the best living authorities ; and he assigns as his reason for the undertaking, that many other and less trustworthy narratives were already in circulation. The familiar intercourse which he held with the apostles entitles him to our confidence as a perfectly trustworthy historian ; yet all his diligence, however great, in sifting rumours to their source, could not prevent his falling into occasional mistakes, especially when dealing with incidents to which none of his informants could by possibility have been eye or ear witnesses. The same cause—*i.e.*, his dependence for information on the statements of others—will account for those discrepancies, never of

much moment, which are discernible between his narrative of particular transactions and the accounts given of them by the rest of the evangelists. But of the authenticity of his writings there can be as little doubt as of any others of the treatises which by Eusebius are classed under the head of authoritative documents.

Of St John personally, we know perhaps more than we do of any other of the evangelists. From the circumstantial account which he has given of the Baptist's interview with the deputation from the Sanhedrim beside the Jordan, of his recognition of Jesus as the Messiah, and of the effect produced by it upon two of his own disciples, we collect that John the Evangelist was one of these disciples; and all the biographies of Jesus extant concur in assuring us that, having joined himself to Christ, he stood higher in the favour of his Master, and was, with Peter and James, admitted to a larger share of his Master's confidence, than the rest of the apostles. We know, also, that after the crucifixion he received the mother of Jesus into his house, and became to her as a son. Under such circumstances, we might naturally expect to obtain from his narrative a more perfect insight into both the daily life and the doctrine of Christ than from any other. Yet in regard to the events of Christ's life the very reverse is the fact; for on all that befell Jesus prior to attaining the thirtieth year of

His age, St John is absolutely silent. In the matter of Christ's moral teaching likewise, certainly in reference to its authoritative tone, he is more reticent than either St Matthew, St Mark, or St Luke. We conclude, therefore, that the object of his writing was different from theirs ; and happily we are not left without a clue to guide us in searching it out.

In St Paul's First Epistle to Timothy (i. 20), we read that heresies had already begun to disturb the peace of the Church, and that Hymenæus and Alexander were leaders in the movement. The particular heresy referred to in this passage is Gnosticism—a semi-philosophical, semi-religious system, of which, for the present, it may suffice to say that it was altogether subversive of the simple truths set forth in the Gospel. St John, it will be remembered, survived by many years the generation into which he was born. The heresy which in St Paul's day was just beginning to show itself, had, ere his demise, become formidable ; and old as he was, he directed against it the authority of his pen. It is especially in opposition to the views entertained by the Gnostics of the process by which the world was created, and the opinions which they consequently held concerning the nature and office of Christ, that in the five introductory verses to his first chapter St John protests. The terms “word,” “life,” and “light,” were technical in the philosophy of the Gnostics ; and St John's



declarations concerning them, which are doctrinal, not historical, affirm that they were employed by those heretics to propagate dogmas at once blasphemous and absurd. It is the more necessary to bear this in mind, because the term "word," *λογος*, though recurring several times in the Old Testament—as, for example, in Psalm xxxiii. 6—is never used, any more than "wisdom," to denote a being separate and distinct from Jehovah. St John is not, therefore, in the introduction to his Gospel, appealing to the old beliefs of the Jewish prophets, much less endeavouring to show that they saw through a glass darkly what in post-apostolic times the orthodox Church authoritatively affirmed. All that he aims at and achieves is, to assert that not two wills but one was exercised in the work of creation; that in Him alone by whom creation was achieved is self-existence; and that this self-existent life is the light of the world.

St John, however, had yet another heresy to confute, that of the Sabians—a sect whose opinions corresponded in many respects, though not in all, with those of the Gnostics. Both were believers in the creation of the world by an inferior deity, between whom and the Supreme came an order of *Æons*, or divine beings, one of whom united himself to Jesus at His baptism, and departed from Him at His death. But the Sabians went further than this; for they contended that John the Baptist was favoured in like man-

ner, and that the *Æon* which joined itself to him was called "Light." To the inferior deity—the god, as they held, of the Jews—they gave the name of "Demi-urge." The *Æons* were severally known as the "Only-begotten," the "Word," "Light," "Life," &c., and rose one above another in dignity, though to which of them either the highest or the lowest rank was assigned is uncertain.

The Sabian heresy is specially struck at in the verses which describe the Baptist as nothing more than a witness to that true light which, in the person of Christ, had come into the world. He, the long-promised Messiah, came unto His own (people), and His own (people) received Him not. He was Himself "the Word;" in Him was the Word made flesh; and so long as He dwelt among us, we believers beheld His glory, the glory as of "the Only-begotten" of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Such, according to the universal testimony of antiquity, were the more direct motives which induced St John in his old age to compile a work which should represent Christ as claiming in all His discourses to be what the Gnostics and Sabians denied that He was.

But a secondary consideration is represented to have weighed with St John in determining the precise tone which he gave to his biographical sketch. In the 13th and 14th chapters of the 6th book of his Ecclesiastical History, Eusebius gives a sort of *cata-*

*logue raisonné* of the various works of Clement of Alexandria which were read in his day. Among them is one which discusses the merits, as well as the object, of each of the four Gospels; and from this, Eusebius gives the following quotation: "John, the last survivor of the whole, observing that the other evangelists had detailed in full everything relating to Christ's human nature—in other words, his dealings as man with man—being himself filled with the Holy Ghost, wrote, at the request of his intimate friends, a spiritual Gospel." There is nothing in this statement at all contradictory of the hypothesis already advanced. The two, on the contrary, are in perfect accord with each other: because, if St John wrote, as he is said to have done, at Ephesus, he wrote in a place which was the very hotbed of Gnosticism; and by no other process could the absurdity of the Gnostic heresy be more effectually exposed than by placing upon record those sublime discourses which fill so large a space in his biography of Christ.

We come now to the book of the Acts of the Apostles, concerning the authorship of which there is, as there has always been, a complete concord of opinion. The same hand which drew up the Gospel according to St Luke, drew up likewise the Acts of the Apostles. Of this we are satisfied, not only because the latter treatise is, like the former, dedicated to Theophilus, but because the style and manner of dealing with the

subjects taken in hand are to the most minute particular the same in both. The book of the Acts of the Apostles must not, however, be read as if it were, or pretended to be, a faithful history of the Church during the thirty years which succeeded the crucifixion. Had the writer intended to produce a work of this sort, he would have taken a far wider range, and spoken of many important matters on which he is silent. His work, for example, scarcely notices at all the condition of the Church in Jerusalem subsequently to St Paul's conversion. It makes no allusion whatever to the progress of the new faith in Egypt, or in the countries bordering on the Euphrates and the Tigris. It describes neither St Paul's journey into Arabia, nor the early growth of that Christian community by which, on his arrival at Rome, he was cordially welcomed. One shipwreck in which St Paul bore a part is indeed minutely detailed, but of the other two referred to in the First Epistle to the Corinthians no notice is taken; and concerning his epistles generally, and their contents, the book maintains a perfect silence. What object, then, could St Luke have had in view when he wrote this treatise? His object clearly was to vindicate the right of the Gentiles to free admission into the Church of Christ—a claim of which the justice was denied by Jewish converts, except on terms to which the Gentiles were not willing to submit. Hence the elabo-

ration with which St Luke describes the conversion of the Samaritans, the baptism of Cornelius, and the proceedings of the first council held at Jerusalem on the question raised by these memorable events. Yet even in following up this design, St Luke is careful to confine his narrative almost entirely to what he had himself heard and seen. Rarely, indeed, will he be found to venture further, and then only when the means of verifying his statements are at hand, as in the account which he gives of St Paul's visit to Athens, and of his pleadings before Festus and Felix, the details of which, including the addresses delivered on both occasions, he doubtless received from St Paul himself. Another point in connection with this treatise deserves notice. Though thrown together loosely—it preserves from beginning to end a more strict chronological order than marks the course of any of the Gospels. Dates are not, indeed, given. It was not so much the custom with ancient writers as it is with moderns to set down the precise day, or even the year, when the events of which they were speaking occurred. But the range of the narrative carries us from A.D. 33 to A.D. 65, at which time, being the second year of St Paul's first imprisonment at Rome, the treatise appears to have been completed.

Such are the documents to the study of which the inquirer must apply himself who is honestly desirous



of ascertaining what Christianity was when it came fresh and pure from the hands of its Divine Founder. In the genuine Epistles of St Paul, St Peter, and St John, he will doubtless find much to aid him in this endeavour ; but his main reliance must be upon the declarations of Christ Himself, because even in apostolic times heresies were rife, and in the ages immediately succeeding that of the apostles they became rampant. It is of the utmost importance, therefore, that he should be satisfied respecting the authenticity of these documents. If any doubt on that head overshadow his mind, no benefit can possibly accrue either to himself or to others from a study of their contents, whatever may be the amount of impartiality and care with which it is conducted. Are there, then, reasonable grounds for calling in question what has been the settled belief of Christendom for eighteen hundred years ? We think not : at all events if there be, the sooner we close the volume of ancient history the better ; because the evidence on which we accept as genuine the works attributed to Thucydides, to Xenophon, to Polybius, to Cicero, to Cæsar, and to Livy, is feeble in comparison with that which supports the claims of St Matthew, St Mark, St Luke, and St John, to be the authors of the treatises which pass severally under their names.

The justice of this conclusion has been so repeatedly

demonstrated \* that we might, with perfect propriety, refrain from discussing the point again, had not a late writer, with much display of learning, and more plausibility, renewed the attack that was made upon the trustworthiness of the New Testament by Lord Bolingbroke in the last century. The author of 'Supernatural Religion' has devoted two closely-printed octavo volumes to prove that the four Gospels, as we read them at this day, must have been unknown to the early fathers of the Church. "From Clement of Rome," he says, "down to Papias of Hierapolis, not one of these fathers makes a single quotation from any of the Gospels connecting it with the name of St Matthew, St Mark, St Luke, or St John" —a circumstance which, according to his view of the case, is decisive of the question at issue, inasmuch as all are careful, when quoting from the Old Testament, to refer specially to the book from which each extract is taken. The inference to be drawn is obvious. The fathers were doubtless familiar with biographies of Christ, of which a vast variety were in circulation in their day. But of authoritative versions of the marvellous story they knew nothing; otherwise, in telling their disciples what Jesus taught, they would have transcribed entire passages from these versions,

\* See Lardner's *Credibility*; Less's *Truth of the Christian Religion*; Michaelis's *Introduction to the New Testament*, &c.

instead of contenting themselves, as they invariably do, with giving the substance of his doctrine—and that, too, in words no longer to be found in any of the Gospels of which the manuscripts are extant.

We admit the facts as here stated, but absolutely reject the inference. As well might it be contended that because St Paul makes no verbal quotations from the Epistles of St Peter and St John, and because St Peter and St John make no verbal quotations from St Paul's Epistles, therefore each must have been ignorant of the labours, not to say the existence, of the others; consequently the writings attributed to the whole must be spurious. Nor is this all. If the author of 'Supernatural Religion' had looked further afield than the writings of the fathers, he would have discovered that the ancients rarely quote from one another at all, and still more rarely at any length. Aulus Gellius, for example, though he refers frequently to Suetonius, never once alludes to Tacitus, much less quotes from him. Yet nobody on that account arrives at the conclusion that what we read as the histories and annals of Tacitus are therefore spurious.

Again, setting aside as ill-founded the suspicion now generally prevalent among scholars, that many of the works referred to by our author are themselves spurious, the care manifested by all early writers to make their quotations from the Old Tes-

tament verbally accurate, while they content themselves with giving the substance of Christian doctrine, militates in no degree against either the authority of the New Testament or the authenticity of the several books of which it is composed. The Old Testament was read from their childhood by Jews and Christians alike. The New could be regarded only as supplementary to it and fulfilling its object. Now the main purpose of apostolic teaching was to show that between the great doctrines taught by Moses and the prophets, and the truths made clear by Christ, there was entire agreement. Constant allusions are therefore made to the former in every speech and letter of the early Christian teachers, which they are careful to verify by citing verbatim from the Scriptures, with which both converts and adversaries were familiar. But the several treatises of which the New Testament is made up, as they were written at different times and under various circumstances, so they could not be collected into a volume while as yet it was uncertain whether additions might not be made to them. This uncertainty came to an end only when the last survivor of the apostles had run his course; and that event, according to the best authorities, did not occur till towards the very end of the first century. Even then, however—even after the canon both of the Gospels and of the Epistles was completed—the great aim of all who laboured actively to ex-

tend the limits of Christianity, and at the same time to confirm in the faith such as were already converted, necessarily was to make manifest the ground on which their argument rested. For it was not seventeen hundred years ago, as it is now, that the authority of the Scriptures of the New Testament was universally admitted. "All Holy Scripture," of which the apostle speaks, comprised only the writings which had for centuries been read in the temples and synagogues of the Jews. To have striven by reference to what the apostles and evangelists had written to prove that Jesus was the Christ would have been labour lost. Such writings might be alluded to as embodying the teachings of their great Master, whether it bore upon theology or morals. But to affirm that Jesus was the promised Messiah, on the ground that He had taken this character to Himself, or that it had been attributed to Him by His biographers and personal followers, could have commanded no attention from any one.

No fact connected with the growth of Christianity in the second and third centuries can, on the other hand, be more certain than that the four Gospels are constantly spoken of by the early fathers in terms of profound respect—by early heretics as narratives deserving either of no credit at all, or of credit only so far as they chime in with the peculiar opinions of their critics. The works of these heretics have indeed



come down to us only in such fragments as their orthodox antagonists transferred to their own pages. The mistaken zeal of Christian emperors doomed them to destruction—a calamity much to be deplored. Yet enough has been preserved to show that as early as the year 136, and earlier, neither Cerinthus, a contemporary of St John, nor the Ebeonite Christians of Pella, nor Marcion, against whom Epi-  
phanus wrote, pretended to deny the authenticity of either the Gospels or of the Epistles, though they interpolated some to meet their own views, and denounced others as unfit to be addressed to Christians.

It was not to be expected that the proceedings of a sect so obscure, as for the first two centuries the Christians undoubtedly were, should attract the attention or provoke the hostility of heathen writers unless they themselves happened to be addicted to philosophical research. The few that did assail the infant Church never, as far as we are aware, charged its members with forging their sacred books. Of the objections taken by Celsus to the new creed we know nothing more than Origen and Chrysostom have told us; and Lucian writes as a man might be expected to do who had taken no pains to investigate a subject brought under his notice by a detected impostor. Porphyry lived much later. He flourished about the middle of the third century; and in the fragments which alone survive of his voluminous attacks on Christianity, references

are made to the Gospels of St Matthew, St Mark, and St John, to the Acts of the Apostles, and to St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. These he criticises severely—not denying their authenticity, but alleging that apostles and evangelists alike were illiterate men, incapable of quoting correctly from the Old Testament itself, and constantly misapplying its statements. Now Porphyry, as is shown in his lives of the philosophers, was a man of cultivated mind and large erudition. He had travelled much, and conversed with Christians in Tyre, in Sicily, and at Rome. Born in Basan, he was familiar with the Syriac language, and had ample means of intercourse with the Nazarenes, who made use only of the Hebrew version of St Matthew's Gospel. If it had been possible for any man to point to a time when the canonical books of the New Testament previously unknown were palmed off upon a credulous community, he would have exposed the forgery. No trace of a suspicion of this sort can, however, be detected in any of his writings. Of the Book of Daniel he did not scruple to declare that it was a document forged after the time of Antiochus Epiphanes; and his reasons for holding to this opinion are, to say the least of them, extremely plausible. But against the authenticity of the Gospels he utters not a single word. With these overwhelming proofs before us that the New Testament is not a collection of comparatively

recent forgeries, that it was accepted for what it still professes to be both by friends and enemies in the earliest times of Christianity, we can well afford to treat with indifference whatever attempts are made to shake our faith in their authenticity by a process of reasoning so illogical as that to which the author of 'Supernatural Religion' has committed himself.

But is it quite certain that the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles were really written by the men to whom we attribute them? Of the authenticity of St Paul's Epistles it is impossible to doubt, just as it is impossible to doubt that the letters of Cicero are authentic. But without venturing to dispute the great antiquity of the books in question—without presuming to deny that they were old in the days of Eusebius, and recognised as authoritative by Clement of Alexandria—what proof have we that they were not compiled, as we know that many other spurious gospels were compiled, by unknown persons, in an age when the personal attendants of Christ had all passed away, out of traditions supposed to contain the substance of what was then accepted as the declarations, partly of one of the defunct evangelists, partly of another? Absolute certainty on any disputable point, carrying us so far back as the beginning of the Christian era, is perhaps unattainable. Cicero may not, after all, be the author of the Tusculan questions; Tacitus may never have written his Annals,

nor Cæsar his Commentaries,—though it would not be easy to convince any careful student of history that doubts on these heads are rational. Are there, then, any special circumstances which should render us more distrustful of historical evidence in the case of the evangelists than in the cases of classic philosophers and historians? Quite otherwise. Cicero, Tacitus, and Cæsar wrote as all educated Romans did. If it had been thought worth while, at any time subsequently to their demise, to impose upon the world a fictitious work claiming to have one or other as its author, no insuperable obstacle to the success of the forgery would have been presented in the style or manner of the composition. The forger might fail to catch, in its perfection, the elegance of Cicero, the terseness of Tacitus, the marvellous brevity and distinctness of Cæsar; but his language would have been the pure Latin language, as little adulterated by foreign idioms as that of Cæsar, or Tacitus, or Cicero himself. Now, it happens that the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles are written in a language so peculiar as to render a successful imitation of their style by a writer of the second century impossible. The character is Greek, the idioms are everywhere Syriac or Hebrew; and it is a well-attested fact, that after the death of the first converts, scarcely a single teacher of Christianity was a Jew by descent. It is certain, also, that the fathers were almost to a man ignorant of

Hebrew. From all this, it follows that the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, by whomsoever composed, must have been composed by persons contemporary with Christ and His apostles. And if composed by Jewish converts, as they unquestionably were, why should we hesitate to believe that they are what the Church has in all ages pronounced them to be, the genuine works of St Matthew, St Mark, St Luke, and St John ?



## CHAPTER VII.

REASONS FOR NOT REFERRING TO THE FIRST CHAPTERS OF ST MATTHEW, AND TRUSTING ST LUKE ONLY SO FAR AS HE IS SUPPORTED BY THE OTHER EVANGELISTS—THE STATE OF THE WORLD, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND RELIGIOUS, AT THE BIRTH OF CHRIST—ETHICS EVERYWHERE DIVORCED FROM RELIGION—THE OPINIONS OF THE JEWS—OF THE THEISTIC SCHOOLS OF GREECE AND ROME—OF THE ATHEISTIC SCHOOLS—THE VIEWS OF EASTERN PHILOSOPHERS—TWO PRINCIPLES, GOOD AND EVIL—THE TRIAD—THE PLEROMA—ÆONS—THE DEMIURGE—MAN—HIS DIVIDED WORSHIP—TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS—THE JEWS BORROW MUCH FROM THE ORIENTALS IN THEIR CAPTIVITY—THE EFFECT UPON THEM OF THE CULTURE OF GREEK LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY.

HAVING thus satisfied ourselves respecting the general character of the books to which we are indebted for all that we know concerning the life and doctrine of Christ, our next endeavour must be to collect, chiefly from His own recorded declarations, materials from which may be formed a just appreciation of the objects of His mission, and of the means by which they were achieved. In circumscribing our inquiry within these limits, we are necessarily precluded from noticing, either with approval or disapproval, the first two chapters of St Matthew's Gospel. We must

be content also to treat that of St Luke as a work of authority only so far as its statements agree with those which we find in the other Gospels. But the childlike believer need not on that account take alarm. We write, not for him, nor for such as he, but for that large and, it is feared, increasing section of society, which cannot be persuaded to take anything on trust, but requires positive evidence, such as can be furnished only by those who were personally cognisant of the matters under discussion, before it will admit to be possible incidents which in any degree go beyond the limits of their own experience, as it bears upon the common course of visible nature. Now, the marvellous events of which St Matthew and St Luke speak as preceding and attending the birth of Christ, however dear they may be to the hearts of Christian men, and in themselves worthy of all confidence, undoubtedly rest, so far as we are concerned, on tradition alone. Inspired tradition the Church holds it to be, and because dictated by inspiration, trustworthy to the letter ; yet it is past dispute that neither by our Lord Himself in His after-life, nor by St Mark and St John in their Gospels, nor by any of the first teachers of Christianity, whether we look to what is recorded of them in the Acts of the Apostles, or examine such of their epistles as are extant, is the most remote allusion ever made to the events in question. Must we, then, cast them

aside as mere fables ? Certainly not. But just as certainly we shall defeat our own purpose if, in conducting an inquiry like the present, we demand for them the place of authority which has been assigned to the two postulates on which the whole of our argument turns. Indeed we may venture to go further. Treating the subject as with all humility we presume to do, neither will the acceptance of their reality, assuming them to be real, add one jot to the importance of the conclusions to which the sacred narrative leads up, nor will their rejection, if they be rejected as apocryphal, detract from it. In either case, the fact remains that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners ; that to prepare for His coming, the world underwent a training which ranged through countless ages ; and that when the fulness of time arrived, the great purpose for which this elaborate preparation was made received its accomplishment. Another reason for confining our inquiry within the limits here laid down is this. If we receive as evidence in support of our views the record of events which occurred before the great Master declared Himself, and to the reality of which neither He nor His apostles ever bore testimony, we shall find it difficult to reject, or even to distrust, statements adduced as His subsequently to the close of His labours and those of His immediate followers. But the moment we pass beyond the apostolic age,

and look elsewhere for instruction than to the writings of men who conversed with Christ, difficulties innumerable beset us on every side. This need not be a matter of surprise to any one. The same causes which operated to make a ready way for the spread of the Gospel throughout the world, led to the partial engrafting of error upon truth as soon as there ceased to be at hand a living authority from the decisions of which there could be no appeal. The writings of the apostles themselves show that it was no easy matter even in their day to prevent the adulteration of Christian verity by the admixture both of Jewish prejudice and pagan philosophy. When the apostles had run their course, and their doctrine came to be offered by less able hands to the sages of Alexandria, of Ephesus, and of Rome, these dealt with it as they would have done with any other philosophical system which was new to them. They did their best to harmonise whatever struck them in its teaching as sublime with the more crude ideas that were dominant in their respective schools. We shall take occasion by-and-by to point out to what extent this circumstance tended at once to aid the progress and somewhat to dull the lustre of Gospel truth. Meanwhile it may be useful to take a brief survey of the condition — political, social, and religious — of the known world \* at the period when Christianity was

\* We refer, of course, to what was called the Roman world only—

first presented to mankind ; because only by a right understanding of this matter shall we be able to see clearly why the era in which they lived was described by the personal followers of Jesus Christ as the fullness of time.

Of the political condition of the world at the beginning of the Christian era it would be waste of words to say much. Rome had then attained to the summit of her greatness. She was mistress in the west of Italy, Sicily, and France, of a considerable portion of Hungary and of Germany, of what is now the Ottoman Empire in Europe, of Greece, of Britain, and of both portions of the Spanish peninsula. Her empire extended in Africa over Egypt and Ethiopia ; in Asia, through Palestine to the provinces bordering on the Mediterranean, and beyond these as far back as the Euphrates. An enormous space of territory this, throughout which a stern rule kept both the highways open and the oceans free, and over which, by a well-arranged system of colonisation, she extended by degrees her literature, her laws, and her manners.

Nor was her influence felt and acknowledged only in regions where her proconsuls exercised supreme power. To the utmost limits of the known world the fame of her prowess had extended, so that, covered by the prestige of her citizenship, travellers

*i. e.*, to that portion of the world with which the Romans were acquainted.



might penetrate wellnigh unmolested whithersoever they pleased. Moreover, the policy of Rome, so far as concerned abstract opinion, was liberal in the extreme. No human being was prevented from entertaining his own views of politics, of morals, and of religion, nor from communicating them orally or by writing to others, so long as he took care not to assail too openly the established institutions of the state. All at which the magistrate aimed was to preserve order, and this he did by punishing severely offences against property and person—unless, indeed, they happened to be committed under his own sanction and for his own personal aggrandisement, when justice slept.

To describe even in outline the social condition of the Roman empire during the first century of the Christian era would require far greater space than is consistent with the plan of the present volume. It may suffice to point out that it was not the custom of the Romans to interfere more than could be helped with the social arrangements of the peoples whom they brought under subjection. They rarely went further than to put down human sacrifices wherever they found them in use, and to keep in their own hands the exclusive right of inflicting capital punishment. In all other respects, conquered nations were allowed to manage their domestic affairs according to the usages which had come to them from their fore-

fathers. Hence customs varied in different portions of the empire almost as much as they vary now in the different countries of the world. One institution appears, however, to have held good as well in the capital as in the most distant of the provinces. The governing classes were absolute masters of the classes below them. Everywhere domestic slavery of the most atrocious kind prevailed. Even the fields were to a large extent cultivated, factories worked, and the details of business transacted, by slave labour. The very teachers of youth were in many instances bondsmen, who might or might not receive as the reward of their diligence manumission when their pupils attained to manhood. There could be no security for the many against the tyranny of the few where institutions of this sort prevailed, and the many were in consequence long-suffering in the most extended sense of that term, while the few were capricious, exacting, and cruel.

When we come again to morals properly so called, the picture which the classic writers draw for us is simply shocking. How it fared with the humbler classes in this respect nobody has thought it worth while to describe. But the nobles and the gentry, as we should call them, practised, without any attempt at concealment, vices, even to speak approvingly of which would, in Europe at least, cover the speaker with disgrace. In the cities, and especially in Rome,

the extremes of luxury and refinement coexisted with the most savage brutality. Of the games in the amphitheatre we have spoken elsewhere, as well as of the habitual disregard of the marriage tie; and when we add to these practices the contempt for human life and suffering which is engendered of slavery, the ferocity of the punishments to which criminals were subjected, the indifference with which infants were cast out and the destitute left to perish, we have said enough to justify the conclusion that, however successful Rome may have been in keeping the surface of society smooth, she left all that was beneath to seethe and ferment in a state of hideous and dangerous corruption.

Of the religions that prevailed in the world at the period of Christ's birth, it may suffice to say that they exercised little if any influence for good over the daily lives of such as professed them. Even in Palestine, where divine honours were paid exclusively to the first great Cause, there was a general divorce of ethics from theology. In every other country under heaven this divorce was complete. The religion of the heathen, made up as it was entirely of devotional exercises and processions, always frivolous, often impure, began and ended with the occasion which provoked it. His inner devotion, if he had any, led him to propitiate gods of whom he was afraid with offerings that were sometimes cruel

and sometimes immoral. For the deities which he worshipped were of both sexes ; and though superior in power to men, and in their nature immortal, they were in every other respect just as much swayed by passion and prejudice, and in their proceedings a thousand times more vindictive, licentious, and unjust. Such a religion may be described rather as antagonistic to purity of life than alienated from it. Its requirements could not be satisfied without due attention to rites of which priests were the recognised guardians ; and these rites being performed, neither priest nor god had any further claim on the consideration of the worshipper.

The state of things among the Jews, though less glaringly repulsive, was, so far as regarded the influence of religion upon morals, little if at all more satisfactory. Seventy years spent in a foreign land, where the worship of the temple was impossible, appear to have weaned the people from that proneness to idolatry which, for ages preceding the Captivity, had been their besetting sin ; and they returned from Babylon bigotedly attached to their law, and prepared to make any sacrifice, and suffer any amount of evil, rather than disobey the letter of its requirements. In this spirit they consented at the bidding of Ezra to put away the wives they had married in the place of their exile, and the children whom these had borne to them ; and rejected with

disdain the proposal of their neighbours of Samaria to co-operate in the restoration of the temple, and to become fellow-worshippers with them. This stern resolve to maintain the absolute purity of their blood brought upon them the hatred of all other nations ; yet to it, and to the worship of the one true God, they ever after adhered with a pertinacity which neither cajolery nor persecution could overcome.

The return from the captivity was far from including the whole body of the Jewish nation. Many families, the descendants of those whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away, refused to abandon their homes on the Euphrates ; and a still larger colony of fugitives struck root, and grew into importance, at Alexandria, in Egypt. The Babylonian Jews never separated themselves in sentiment or customs from their brethren of Judea. Though rarely presenting themselves in the new temple which Nehemiah had built upon the foundations of the old, they sent their contributions regularly for its maintenance, and regarded it as the centre of their national life. The Alexandrian Jews, on the other hand, built a temple for themselves, and there, under the superintendence of a high-priest and priests, duly consecrated, they burnt incense and offered sacrifice from day to day, exactly as was done in the rival temple at Jerusalem.

Besides these two great offshoots from the parent tree, the Jews established themselves in considerable



numbers, some on compulsion, others for mere purposes of trade, in almost every town of importance bordering on the Mediterranean, and in Rome itself. Of these latter colonies, the most important struck root in Antioch, in Ephesus, in the province of Galatia, and at Tarsus. Galilee was full of them, and in the province of Samaria itself a few families found their home. The whole of these, like the Babylonian Jews, contributed faithfully to the maintenance of the temple at Jerusalem; and, at the seasons appointed by the law, flocked thither in large numbers to pay their devotions.

Besides the temple, the Jews, after the return from Babylon, built for themselves synagogues, or houses of prayer, in every city and village where they dwelt. Regularly as the Sabbath-day came round the law was read in these synagogues, and the books of the prophets searched for indications of the speedy coming of the Messiah. For deeper and deeper, from day to day, as the need was felt to be the sorest, grew the conviction that the Deliverer, whom Isaiah and Daniel had promised, must soon make his appearance. And yet we know upon the highest authority that all this display of zeal in God's service, this fierce spirit of nationality, and adherence to the letter of the law, had its source in no more lofty principle than pride of race—that it put no restraint whatever upon the cupidity, the licentiousness, and the malice of such

as were most forward to make a public display of it. The Pharisees were "hypocrites, who devoured widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers." The Sadducees, equally immoral, if they entertained any religious convictions at all, were at best cold and speculative deists. Religion, with the former, was the tithing of mint, anise, and cummin; with the latter, the decent observance of the rites which the law had enjoined. As to the Herodians, they adjusted their zeal, even in matters ceremonial, to the caprices of their rulers for the time being. In a word, while among the Jews one fixed idea dominated all men's minds—viz., that Jehovah would again lay bare His arm, and beat down the Gentiles under the feet of His chosen people—there was everywhere else an absolute distrust of the legends which men had received from their forefathers, and an entire abandonment of hope that through any authoritative channel the opportunity would be afforded them of replacing worn-out superstitions with better things. And yet in all lands, both among high and low, there was a yearning desire for enlightenment. To the virtuous poor and the suffering, religion is, and always must be, a reality—we might have said a necessity. They feel the burden of their appointed lot, and their inability to cast it off; and they turn with an earnestness unknown to persons more favoured by fortune to the hope of a future state,

in which the inequalities of the present shall be redressed. And if such be the case now in Christian countries, where all men are equal before the law, much more acutely and universally did the sentiment prevail in times when the poor had no rights except such as a wealthy patron might assert for them, or a master concede, less stony-hearted than his fellows. On the other hand, nothing can be more striking, and to a certain extent more sad, than the constant striving of the highest intellects in the pre-Christian world after truths which they never succeeded in grasping. How nearly they approached at times to the coveted end is shown in many passages of their writings still extant. How entirely they distrusted their own arguments appears in the contradictions into which they continually ran. We speak now, it will be seen, of what may be called the philosophers of the theistic schools, in contradistinction to that still larger body of thinkers who in the Augustan age made open profession of atheism. A few words with respect to the prevalent opinions of both parties may not be out of place.

Without stopping to inquire whence they took their beginnings, it may suffice to remind our readers that four schools of theistic philosophy were known to classic antiquity—*i.e.*, the Pythagorean, the Platonic, the Peripatetic, and the Stoic. A fifth arose in later times, known as the Eclectic, which aimed at little

else than a reconciliation of the differences which separated one from the other of these older schools, and the extraction from the doctrines of each of what appeared to be excellent. As, in point of fact, these differences touched only minor details, the task which the Eclectics set themselves to perform was not a difficult one. Of the principles propounded in this school, Cicero is by far the best, because the clearest, exponent. His system is one of doubt and perplexity, with a strong leaning towards hopes which, however, he feels himself unable to justify, and which cannot therefore be said to have brought with them much comfort to the inquirer.

The fundamental article in the creed of all the schools of which we are speaking was a belief in the necessary immortality both of spirit and of matter. Spirit was with them the soul of the universe,—matter was its body ; and both having equally existed from everlasting, both were alike indestructible. They might change their forms—if, indeed, spirit can be said to have any form—over and over again, but extinction was not more impossible in the one case than in the other. Upon this foundation was built up another article of belief—*i.e.*, that the soul or vital principle of every creature possessed of animal life is an emanation from the great soul of the universe ; that it enjoys a separate and conscious existence while united to a body ; but that when separated

finally from the material organism through which it had acted, it becomes again absorbed in the source whence it was originally taken. When we look beyond this point, however, we find varieties of opinion in the several schools, of which the importance can hardly be overrated. Pythagoras, for example, and all who adopted his views in their simplicity, were pure necessitarians. Treated exoterically, their metempsychosis became a weapon of great power in the hands of the civil magistrate; read esoterically, in other words, as understood by the initiated, it expressed a natural operation and nothing more, which went on continually and could never cease, because the inexorable law of necessity compelled it. Timæus Locrus, one of the oldest of the disciples of Pythagoras, after showing that a belief in a future state of rewards and punishments is essential to the wellbeing of society, goes on to explain his master's true meaning in these words: "For as we sometimes cure the body with unwholesome remedies when such as are in themselves wholesome fail to produce the desired effect, so we restrain those minds by false relations which are unwilling to be guided by the truth. It is necessary, therefore, to impress upon such the dread of torments from without, as that the soul shifts and changes its habitation, that the coward is ignominiously thrust into the body of a woman, the murderer imprisoned in the fur of wild



beasts," &c., &c. On the other hand, Ovid, himself a perfect master of the Pythagorean philosophy, makes Pythagoras, whom he introduces into his *Metamorphoses*, thus ridicule the popular superstition :—

"Oh race, astonished by the fear of death !  
Why shrink from Styx and darkness, empty names—  
The dream of poets, and a false world's scourge ?  
Be sure that bodies, howsoe'er consumed,  
Whether by flame funereal or decay,  
Suffer no further ill. Souls cannot die,  
But, passing ever from their old abodes,  
Seek out new homes, and make their dwelling there."

Pythagoras was a theist in this sense, that he believed in the existence of a spiritual as well as of a material entity. He believed also that the spiritual entity, though not anterior in the order of existence to matter, reduced by a peculiar process material chaos into shape. As to the transition of souls from one body to another, he held that no moral considerations had any effect whatever in bringing them about, inasmuch as the death of each individual man and beast resulted in new combinations of the matter of which the body had been composed, and in new forms of life necessarily incident to such combination. Hence from his philosophy all reference to a future state, where virtue shall be rewarded and vice punished, is eliminated. Teles, a distinguished exponent of the Pythagorean system, puts this point very clearly. He is comforting a friend whom the death of one very dear to him had quite cast down,

and, as quoted by Stobæus, expresses himself thus :  
“ You grieve because he will not live again. Well, he had no existence ten thousand years ago, nor during the Trojan war, nor with your immediate forefathers. These considerations give you no pain. Why should you distress yourself because he will not exist in the future ? ”

The opinions of the Platonic school differ from those of the Pythagorean thus far, that they do, to a certain extent, admit a moral element into their theory. When speaking or writing for the crowd, they spoke or wrote just as Pythagoras had done. Styx, Cocytus, and Acheron were, on such occasions, realities with them. The souls of the wicked passed into asses and swine,—those of the ignorant lay for a season in mire and filth. But there is an end to all this when the initiated are addressed. “ I constantly affirm,” says Plato in his ‘ *Epinomis*, ’ “ both in jest and earnest, that when such an one [a good man] fulfils his destiny by dying, he shall be stripped at his dissolution of the many senses which pertain to him now, and partaking of a simple lot, and out of many becoming one, he shall be happy, wise, and blessed.” Plato’s real view of the metempsychosis, therefore, is that the changes and transitions through which souls pass are the purgations of minds which, because of the pollutions which they have contracted in their separate state, are unfit to reascend to the place

whence they came. Hence pure and immaculate souls are exempt from all transmigrations, and become absorbed at the dissolution of the body into the fountain of life.

Of the views entertained by the Peripatetics, Aristotle, the founder of the school, is the best exponent. He holds that man is composed of three entities : the body, which is material ; the sensitive soul, which sees, hears, smells, walks, and so forth ; and the intellectual soul, which, being divine, in no way blends its energies with the body, but acts independently of it. "That all souls cannot pre-exist," he says in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, "is manifest from this, that those principles of which the action is corporeal can have no being apart from the body—as, for example, the power to walk without feet. It is therefore impossible that such souls [the sensitive souls] should enter in from without, because, being inseparable from the body, they can neither exist by themselves naked and stripped, nor of their own accord enter into a body." It appears, then, that while believing with Pythagoras that both matter and spirit are eternal, and accepting the general notion of a metempsychosis, Aristotle held that at the birth of each particular man a new act of creation took place, and that the sensitive soul which had its beginning at the same time with the corporeal frame passed out of existence when the corporeal frame fell to pieces. It is clear that from such a

theory not only was all account of rewards and punishments in a future state excluded, but that they who accepted it were as incapable as ourselves of conceiving how, without an unbroken connection of the soul with material organs of some kind, there can be any continuity of conscious and individual existence in a world beyond the grave.

The views of the Stoics were in the main pretty much the same as are entertained by rationalistic deists in our own day. They held that God governs the universe by laws that are immutable—that He neither interferes with nor cares for the fortunes of individuals, cities, and peoples ; and hence that there can be no responsibility to Him in a future state for things done or words spoken in the present. Epictetus and Antoninus are equally explicit on that head. "Whither do you go," says the former, "at death ? Nowhere, to your hurt ; you return whence you came—to a friendly consociation with your kindred elements. That which was of the nature of fire in your composition returns to fire ; that which was of earth to earth ; that which was of air to air ; that which was of water to water. There is no hell, nor Acheron, nor Cocytus, nor Pyroflogiston." The latter, though a trifle less dogmatic, is not more consolatory. "He who fears death either fears that he shall be deprived of all sense or that he shall experience different sensations. If all sensations cease, you

will be no longer subject to fear and misery ; if you be invested with senses of another kind, you will continue to exist in that condition."

Besides these schools of theistic philosophy, there were others which taught that all things are in essence what they had ever been, and would so continue throughout eternity. For the professors of this creed there was no First Cause, no Providence, no Supreme Governor of the world. The universe was a material universe, having for its germs atoms or molecules which, in regard to magnitude, they compared to the particles of matter which appear to dance in a strong sunbeam, and under all other conditions are invisible. The founders of this school were Leucippus, Democritus, and Protagoras. Their theory had at least the merit of being perfectly consistent with itself. They held that atoms, being in perpetual motion, are thrown fortuitously together, and assume and retain certain shapes and qualities which subsist till a force superior to that which brought them in contact dissolves and scatters them again. Such a system, as it excluded all belief in spirit or mind as a distinct existence, necessarily derided the idea that moral considerations had any effect in determining the actions of men. The individual might be a good or a bad citizen according as his life and conversation tended to promote or to thwart the wellbeing of others ; but in a strict accep-



tation of the term, he could not be described as either a good or a bad man, because, being nothing more than a machine put together by blind chance, he could not but act as the disposition of the several parts of which he was composed rendered inevitable.

Among the disciples of this school a vast variety of shades of opinion on minor points prevailed. Passing by the rest, it may suffice to notice the views of Epicurus, because these—corrupted no doubt, or, to speak more correctly, carried to their legitimate issues—were, for some time prior to the birth of Christ, almost universally entertained by the educated classes throughout the Roman empire. Like Leucippus and Democritus, Epicurus was an atomical philosopher ; but instead of attributing, as they did, the dispositions of atoms to chance, or believing with Plato that chaos was reduced to order by the second person in a Divine Triad, he taught that Nature is herself an active agent, and that all things take their shapes and qualities from the operation of a plastic power, through which she acts. Gods there might be,—he was rather inclined to believe that there were; but they, like men, must be material entities, though the matter of which they were composed was infinitely more subtle than went to the composition of man or beast. They took, of course, no concern whatever in human affairs. Their existence was a state of entire absence from care, and the intense

enjoyment of refined pleasure ; and whosoever among men succeeded in giving themselves up to similar pursuits, brought their nature nearest to that of the immortal gods. It is easy to see how open a philosophy of this kind was to abuse, and how attractive to men who lived for time only. The aspirations of Epicurus himself might be pure, and even lofty ; but the luxurious Roman senator, the ambitious Roman soldier, the Roman proconsul with an entire province at his feet, saw matters through a different medium. The Epicurean philosophy, as it was professed in Rome, and wherever the influence of Roman civilisation extended, was the fruitful source of sensuality, cruelty, and selfishness.

But it was not from classic sources exclusively that the thinkers of the age about which we are writing drew their inspiration. The East had its schools of philosophy and theology as well as the West, of which the tenets, though divergent on some not unimportant points, all sprang from one common root. Of the more prominent of these diversities it will be necessary to give a brief account, not only because of the effect produced by them when brought in contact with Western thought, but because of the influence which they undoubtedly exercised in fixing the terms, if not to a certain extent in determining the doctrines, which, subsequently to the death of the

apostles, found their way into the creeds of the Christian Church.

In the East not less than in the West the eternity of matter as well as of spirit appears to have been universally accepted, though in every school the Supreme is a spiritual entity apart from matter, and existing in some mysterious way independently of it. But here the unanimity among them ceases. One holds that there are two spiritual entities, both eternal and coequal in power, of which one is the source or principle of all good, the other the source or principle of all evil. Matter is the product or of the essence of the latter ; and in the perpetual strife which is going on between these two principles, all the ills which afflict the world have their origin. Another school, admitting the coeternity of these two principles, considers that the principle of evil is subordinate or inferior in power to the principle of good. A sudden impulse, it appears, constrained this evil principle to reduce chaotic matter into order, and to create man. It is because they owe their condition to the will of a malignant spirit that man and the other inhabitants of the material world are subjected to pain, to sorrow, and to death. A third school elaborates a system in which a triad of divine entities, though certainly not a trinity in unity, makes its appearance. The persons in this triad are the principle of good, the principle of evil, and the creator of

this lower world. But though all three be alike eternal, they are by no means equal in power. The principle of good is immeasurably superior to the other two, though for a season he permits them to exercise independent authority.

This great being, the principle of good, of whom they speak as a most pure and radiant light, had dwelt from all eternity in perfect solitude and absolute tranquillity. He also filled all space, which they call Pleroma, till in process of time he produced from himself two minds of different sexes, which in every essential particular bore a perfect resemblance to their divine parent. From these two sprang other beings, who again propagated their kind, till by-and-by the Pleroma became peopled by a celestial family. This divine race, being by their nature subject to no change, and exempt from mortality, received from the philosopher the name of *Æons*.

Having thus settled the nature and qualities of the highest order of beings, oriental philosophy goes on to explain the mysteries of lower creation, and the actual condition of man. We are told that outside the mansions of light, where dwell the Deity with his celestial offspring, there used to lie a rude and unwieldy mass of matter, agitated by spontaneous, turbulent, and irregular motions. One of the celestial beings, either obeying an innate impulse or appointed by the Supreme to accomplish the task, descended

countless ages ago from the Pleroma, and reduced this chaos to order. He adorned it with every variety of gifts, assuaged its malignity by mixing with it a certain portion of spirit and of celestial matter, and finally stocked it with inhabitants by creating man and a vast variety of inferior animals.

The creator of this lower world is called, in contradistinction to the Supreme, Demiurge. He is a curious compound of admirable qualities and excessive arrogance. Over the world, which owes its existence to him, he claims to exercise independent authority, and requires of mankind that, neglecting the Supreme, they shall render to him exclusively worship and obedience.

With respect to man, he is composed in part of a terrestrial and corrupt body, and in part of a soul, which is celestial in its origin, and in some sense an emanation from the Supreme. The aspirations of this soul are all lofty and noble. It would fain seek out its true source, and worship there ; but the body, which is the seat of all impure and irregular desires, weighs it down, and constrains it to adore the Demiurge. Many are the ways by which the Supreme strives to rescue his offspring from so deplorable a bondage. He speaks to them by visions in the night ; he sends teachers and messengers to enlighten and admonish them. These the Demiurge steadily resists, labouring incessantly to efface from the minds of his



creatures all knowledge of the Supreme Good. Accordingly there is perpetual strife between matter and spirit in every human being. Such souls as, casting off the yoke of the creator and ruler of this lower world, rise to the contemplation of their Supreme Parent, and subdue the motions of impure matter, ascend at the dissolution of their mortal bodies to the Pleroma. Such as remain in bondage to corrupt matter and worship the Demiurge, pass after death into other bodies. In the end, however, all will come right. Most of the souls which are doomed to pass through successive changes will wake up in time from their lethargy, and then the Supreme will come forth from his abode of bliss, destroy this lower world, deliver the souls which are still in servitude, and carry them all to the realm of perfect happiness, where they will abide with him for ever.

We have elsewhere referred in general terms to the state of religion and philosophy among the Jews. A word or two more in continuation of that subject will suffice to complete just such an analysis of thought, in the age which immediately preceded the birth of Christ, as is needed to account, in some degree at least, both for the resistance offered to the new doctrine when first propounded, and, humanly speaking, to its wondrous ultimate success.

The creed of the Jews was still in its main ingredient simple and pure. They believed in one God,

the creator and governor of the universe, who stood indeed towards them in the relation of tutelary deity and of sovereign, but who was likewise the supreme ruler of the whole earth. To Him alone they offered prayer and sacrifice ; yet they had learned to believe in the existence and power of other and inferior spirits, both good and bad. Beelzebub was to them very much what the evil principle was to Eastern theology ; and there is ample proof in the New Testament itself that they credited the pre-existence and transmigration of human souls. These opinions their ancestors had learned to adopt during their protracted captivity in Babylon. From the same source they drew their hidden science, as the mysteries laid down in the Cabbala were called, of which it may suffice to say that, subject only to a few changes of name, they bore a closer resemblance to the dotages of the Persian Magi than to the faith of the patriarchs and of the great founder and lawgiver of their nation. But this is not all. From the date of the capture of Jerusalem by Alexander the Great, Greek philosophy and Greek literature were sedulously cultivated by the more learned of the Jews. In Alexandria especially, these studies received great attention. The consequence was the growth in that city of seminaries, wherein a philosophy was taught, which, being compounded of the views of all existing schools of thought, was quite prepared to receive and ex-

amine any new theories that might be presented, and to reject or accept, or sift and interweave with principles and views of things already established, just as many as appeared most closely to resemble them. In Alexandria, Neoplatonism, as this philosophy was called, attained its full maturity. It blended together Hebrew Theism, Oriental Triadism, and the modified Polytheism of Plato. Concerning this latter, we must bear in mind that, while admitting the existence of many divine beings, the Platonic philosophy held that all were subject to the one Supreme Godhead, consisting of three entities,—namely, the Source or Father of All, Perfect Intellect, and the Soul of the Material World—in other words, Nature.

It was in the schools of Alexandria, and in others like them at Ephesus and Antioch, that Jews and Gentiles learned much, one from the other. In Jerusalem, on the contrary, no fellowship between light and darkness could be admitted. No doubt an inconsiderable sect in Judea proper—the Herodians—adopted the loose principles of the king; but the mass of the people, and a majority at least in the Sanhedrin, were either Pharisees or Saducees in their religious opinions. The latter, as we have elsewhere explained, could be accounted pure theists, nothing more. They believed neither in angels nor devils, and derided the idea both of a past and a future existence for them-

selves. The former were satisfied that as God is the father and ruler of good spirits, so Beelzebub is the ruler and chief of a whole kingdom of devils. They looked forward likewise to a future state, to be preceded by a day of judgment, and fixed the very place where the Great Assize was to be held, in the valley of Jehoshaphat. Whether or no the heathen were to partake in this general resurrection is uncertain. But forasmuch as all good Jews confidently anticipated that Messiah, when He came, would bring the nations under His own dominion, and forasmuch as Messiah was in some mysterious way to conduct the Great Assize, it is natural to conclude that the heathen, converted by the sword to a confession of the true faith, would share in the benefits of a life beyond the grave. The creed of the common people—for it is that of which we are now speaking—was thus at once simple and crude; its main articles were based upon the law and the prophets. In its details it followed unwritten tradition and the oral teaching of the scribes and lawyers.

## CHAPTER VIII.

EXPECTATIONS OF A UNIVERSAL AND BENEVOLENT RULER—ENTER-  
TAINED ELSEWHERE THAN AMONG THE JEWS—THE SIBYL'S BOOKS  
—THE USE MADE OF THEM IN THE ROMAN SENATE—VIRGIL'S  
FOURTH ECLOGUE—THE TESTIMONY OF JOB AND OF BALAAM.

WHILE such was the state of public opinion throughout the whole world—while, except among the Israelites, the multitudes were blind idolaters, and the educated classes either materialistic atheists or speculative theists—there is historical evidence to prove that about the period of Christ's birth, and for some time previously, a widespread expectation prevailed that a wonderful being was about to make his appearance among men, who should subdue to his own rule all the nations of the earth, and confer inestimable benefits upon mankind. That this expectation should have taken deep root among the Jews is not to be wondered at. Their ancient Scriptures abound in passages which were understood by them in those days, and are still understood both by Jews and Christians, to predict the coming of the



Messiah ; and though the part which the promised Christ was to play corresponds but little with the career of Him who brought life and immortality to light, not the less certain is it that to a personage whose arrival they anticipated about the beginning of our era, all the predictions uttered from the times of Moses down to those of Daniel and Habakkuk were by the Jews understood to apply. More especially the promise which fixed the date of its own fulfilment, the well-known calculation of seventy weeks, left no doubt on the mind of any believing Jew that the fulness of time was come. For not only was the given term of years told out, but the political condition of the nation corresponded exactly with the state of things which they had long learned to associate in their own minds with the advent of a great Deliverer. The sceptre may be said to have departed from Judah when the last sovereign of the house of David ceased to reign ; and though the Idumean princes governed, nobody pretended to believe that, dependent as they were upon the will of the Roman emperor, they could in any sense of the term be accounted lawgivers or asserters of the law. On the contrary, the Hellenising designs of Antiochus Epiphanes were under them carried into effect, all the while that ostentatious profession was made of reverence for the ancient institutions of the country. The consequence was, that every earnest Jew longed

and yearned for the day when God should interfere again, as He had often done of old, directly in the affairs of His people, and re-establish, never more to be cast down, the throne of David in Zion.

It is not very easy to determine the precise nature of these anticipations, so far as regarded the condition of the object of them. The ruling classes unquestionably expected a warrior and statesman, zealous for the law as they understood it, and willing and able to break off the Roman yoke from the necks of his countrymen. The poor might or might not share in this expectation. But they undoubtedly looked for something more in the Messiah than either the wisdom of Solomon or the sword of Gideon. Inasmuch, however, as both parties counted upon direct interference in their behalf by signs and wonders, it was but natural that they should be equally attracted first by John the Baptist, when he came to them in the garb and with the boldness of Elijah, and next by Jesus, to whose mission and the object of it John bare witness. Peoples impatient of a foreign tyranny, and ripe for revolt, will accept the leadership of any one who has the hardihood to put himself forward, and gives evidence of his ability to maintain his position. The Israelites, though proud of their origin as a nation, took small account of tribal, much less of family genealogies. John, or Jesus, or Barabbas, or any other individual

who satisfied them that he possessed the talents necessary to insure success, would have found them in the year 30 of our era prompt to enrol themselves under his banner, and to stake their all, as they did a few years later, on the issue of the strife.

It was not, however, in Judea exclusively that the expectation to which we refer had taken root. The translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek rendered them accessible to men of all nations, and we know that they were studied by philosophers other than of Jewish origin in Alexandria, in Ephesus, in Antioch, and by the better educated of the Roman officers who from time to time did duty in Palestine and Syria. In this way expectation may have been awakened among Gentile inquirers, similar to that which stirred the minds of Jewish believers. But other grounds there were for a vague anticipation, however lightly an Epicurean age may have taken account of them. The scholar need scarcely be reminded of the old legend of the Sibyl and her books. As little necessary is it to add that he is not expected to repose the smallest confidence in the details of that legend. But no historical fact can be better vouched for than this, that a volume was preserved in Rome under the Republic and in the beginning of the Empire—that it bore for its title the Oracles of the Cumæan Sibyl—that it was held in the highest veneration—that for the double purpose of insuring its

safety and to prevent its exposure to the vulgar gaze, it was deposited in a stone chest which stood in the temple of Jupiter, in the Capitol, and was committed to the special care of two members of the augural college. From this book the Christian Fathers make quotations, which may or may not be forgeries. Probably most of them are. But as they refer rather to the life and conversation of Jesus Christ, than to the mission of the Messiah and the date of its fulfilment, they would be of no value as far as our present inquiry is concerned, were their authenticity established beyond the possibility of doubt. The case is different when we call to mind the use that was made of this volume on a memorable occasion, and proceed to draw from it a perfectly legitimate conclusion.

Just before setting out on his intended expedition against the Parthians, Julius Cæsar, or his party, made a violent effort to obtain for him the title of king. Recourse was had to the Sibyl's books, and Lucius Cotta, one of the guardians of that treasure, declared in the senate that in these books was a prophecy of a king at that time to make his appearance, whose monarchy was to be universal, and his government a source of happiness to the whole world. It was further stated on the same authority that, except by a king, the Parthians could never be subdued; and the senate was left to draw the obvious

inference, that Cæsar was the object of the Sibyl's prophecies, and that it was their duty to see that he was crowned in the Capitol.

The republican party took the alarm, and Cicero, their great leader, met Cotta's argument, not by denying the reality of the prophecy, which, had it been a forgery, he, as a member of the augural college, had the readiest means of exposing—but first, by alleging that the Sibyl's books were mere rhapsodies; and next, by cautioning the senate to be careful how they made their contents known to the vulgar. His words are these: "Let us adhere to the prudent practice of our ancestors—let us keep the Sibyl in religious privacy; for these writings are calculated rather to extinguish than to propagate superstition."

This testimony is above exception. Cicero, as an augur, had free access to the book in question. It cannot be doubted that he would avail himself of the privilege, for he was a man of very refined taste and much learned curiosity. The bent of his mind also was religious, though subject, like the minds of other thoughtful heathens, to doubt and despondency. We feel ourselves justified, therefore, in believing that the Fathers, whether right or wrong in the quotations which they make from the Sibyl's books, are correct when they describe them as inculcating the worship of the one true God, the doctrine of the immortality



of the soul, and the reality of a future state of rewards and punishments. The publication by authority of a treatise thus diametrically opposed to the legends and practices of the state religion, would have undoubtedly tended rather "to extinguish than to propagate superstition."

Again, it is certain that in the reign of Augustus the contents of the Sibyl's books had become to a certain extent public property. So much at all events was known concerning them, that they were believed to contain a prediction of the restoration of the Golden Age, when some child whose birth might be expected from day to day should have grown to man's estate, and made himself master of the world. All this we learn from Virgil's fourth Eclogue, a poem written in celebration of the consulate of Pollio, of which the real purpose is apt to be misunderstood if attention be not paid to the history of the times. He who looks no further than the poem itself, for example, will conclude that the poet is flattering his friend the consul by foretelling the future greatness of his newly-born son. But it is a remarkable fact that no son was born to Pollio in the year of his consulate, nor for some time after he ceased to be consul. Moreover, we cannot find that within a moderate distance from Pollio's year of office any child was born, either so intimately connected with the ex-consul's family, or in any other respect so

remarkable as to justify the terms of eulogy in which Virgil speaks of the object of his predictions. But this is not all. The terms in which the poet expresses himself concerning the expected child are such as, when purged from a few names of heathen deities and certain allusions to profane mythology, an English reader would accept as applying to the Messiah whom the Jews expected. The child is to regenerate mankind—he is to abolish the Iron and restore the Golden Age—the whole earth is to be so blessed by him, that every district shall produce within itself all that is necessary to make the inhabitants contented. There is to be no more war after his dominion has once been established, and the lion and the lamb are to lie down together. Such is the substance of the poem; and that there may be no mistake as to the grounds on which the poet rests his declarations, he says, “The last age predicted by the Cumæan Sibyl is at hand”—

“Ultima Cumæi venit jam carminis ætas.”

From these premises we draw the conclusion that on the authority of the Sibyl's books a vague expectation floated about among the Romans that about the period of the birth of Jesus Christ a king was to arrive who should prove to be at once the conqueror and benefactor of the world.

But a still more remarkable testimony to the prevalence of this expectation remains to be cited.

About a hundred years before the birth of Christ, a fire broke out in the Capitol which consumed the temple in which the Sibyl's books had been deposited, and with it the books themselves. So much was this calamity taken to heart, that the senate sent out competent persons to search for and bring back, wherever they could be found, copies of the lost oracles. The messengers visited different parts of Asia, the islands of the Archipelago, Africa, and Sicily, and returned bringing with them about a thousand lines. With these the augurs were so entirely satisfied that the senate directed that they should be received and preserved with the same care that had been bestowed upon the originals. It was from this collection that Lucius Cotta quoted, and to which Virgil referred.

We abstain, for obvious reasons, from adding to these proofs of the state of mind of which we have been speaking, the remarkable passage from the Book of Job, wherein the Arab patriarch exclaims, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth." The Book of Job is beyond all question of great antiquity; and its contents, whether they be purely allegorical or based on real occurrences, are confessedly not of Hebrew origin. But forasmuch as the book takes its place in the canon of the Old Testament, the testimony which it bears to the state of public opinion at

any given period must be accepted not as Gentile but as Jewish testimony. In like manner the declaration of Balaam,—“I shall see him, but not now. There shall come a Star out of Jacob,” &c.,—though it be manifestly no Jewish prediction, need not be quoted here. The story of Balaam and his adventures is admittedly one of those which the Christian may be allowed to regard as a popular tradition, without exposing himself to the charge of infidelity. But forasmuch as the words, if spoken at all, could have found their way into Jewish history only because some written record of them was discovered in one or other of the captured Moabitish towns, they undoubtedly deserve to be accepted as bearing witness to the fact that, far beyond the limits of the Jewish commonwealth, the advent of a Messiah was expected.

## CHAPTER IX.

JOHN BAPTIST—INTERROGATED BY A DEPUTATION FROM THE SANHEDRIN—CHRIST APPEARS—IS OBSERVED BY THE DEPUTATION—WHAT THEY LEARN RESPECTING HIM—HOW THE REPORT AFFECTS THEM—HE IS KNOWN THEN AND TO THE CLOSE OF HIS LIFE AS JESUS OF NAZARETH—WE ARE CONCERNED NOT SO MUCH WITH WHAT JESUS WAS AND WHENCE HE CAME, AS WITH WHAT HE CAME TO DO AND HOW HE DID IT—HOW JESUS BORE HIMSELF TOWARDS MAN—HOW TOWARDS GOD—THE TOKENS OR BADGES OF CITIZENSHIP IN GOD'S KINGDOM UPON EARTH—SIMILARITY BETWEEN THE OLD KINGDOM AND THE NEW—IN WHAT RESPECTS THEY DIFFER.

THE Roman world was in this condition socially, politically, and religiously when tidings reached the Sanhedrin or National Council at Jerusalem that a remarkable person had made his appearance in the country beyond the Jordan, and that all men were flocking to him to be baptised. The council met to consider what ought under the circumstances, and in the well-known state of public opinion in Judea, to be done. No one seems to have doubted that the times for the coming of the Messiah were complete ; and as the prophets had given no clue whereby his identity might at the outset be established, they naturally



looked with mingled hope and distrust towards every man who put himself forward as a leader, or even as a teacher of the people. More than one pretender to a divine mission had already come to the front, only to subside again ; and it was determined to do in the present instance what had either not been done on former occasions at all, or done very imperfectly. A deputation from the Sanhedrin was directed to go down to Bethabara, and by inquiry and by personal observation to discover what the character of the supposed prophet might be, and what the object of his ministrations.

The deputation acted on the instructions received, and found in Bethabara a man of austere demeanour, who was clothed, like Elijah, in skins, and subsisted on the coarsest viands. Crowds attended him wherever he went, though his speech was rough, and his aspect stern ; for his constant cry was “ Repent, repent ; the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Being questioned by the deputies, he declared at once that he was not the Christ,—that he was not Elias,—that he was not one of the old prophets risen from the dead. He claimed, however, to be himself the subject of ancient prophecy ; for he said, “ I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord ; make His paths straight.” Now this declaration of Isaiah, though universally accepted in the Church, and affirmed by Christ Himself to have applied to

His immediate forerunner, was not so understood by the Jewish doctors. Tradition, in what source originating it is hard to say, had taught them to look, just before the Messiah should be revealed, for the reappearance of Elijah in the flesh. And as John refused to accept that title, and denied that he was Christ, they came to the conclusion that they had not found in him either the Deliverer of whom they were in search or His precursor. They returned, therefore, to the capital, to report to those for whom they acted the fruitless issue of their enterprise.

An interval—we are unable to fix its exact limits, but they were certainly narrow—elapsed, when a second rumour attracted the attention of the Sanhedrin. Another person, still more remarkable than the first, had arisen in Galilee, and was drawing all men after him. Again they sent forth members of their own body to inquire, and on this occasion the report transmitted to the council proved to be a perplexing one. Its substance may be stated thus :—

The subject of the present inquiry was represented to have dwelt from his childhood in the little town of Nazareth, in Galilee. His life had been as unobtrusive as it was possible for the life of any man to be. The son of a carpenter, he had received just such an education as was given to every Jewish child of his class, but his thirst for knowledge was described to have been intense, and his progress in acquiring it far

surpassed that of the most forward of his contemporaries. It was even told of him that, on one occasion, he strayed from the caravan with which he and his parents were travelling; that his parents returned to Jerusalem to seek for him, and found him after three days sitting among the doctors in the temple, and conversing with them on the gravest subjects. He was then barely twelve years old. From the date of that occurrence, however, till he reached the usual prophetic age, nothing whatever was heard of him. Indeed, even they who subsequently became his biographers are content to cover that interval with the words, "He grew in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man."

The deputies from the Sanhedrin appear not to have ascertained, nor is there anything stated in the Gospels to inform us, under what circumstances the subject of their inquiry quitted the paternal roof. They doubtless learned, as we do from the last of the evangelists, that John Baptist, seeing Jesus pass by on a certain occasion, exclaimed in the hearing of the crowd, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man who is preferred before me; for he was before me." They learned also, as we do from the statements of each of the four evangelists, that Jesus came to John and solicited baptism at his hands; that John, not without a strong re-

monstrance, yielded to the request ; and that strange sights and sounds were said to have accompanied the performance of the ceremonial. Beyond this, however, their inquiries met with no response. Their informants knew only that Jesus had come from Nazareth, that He had been baptised in the river Jordan, and had withdrawn Himself immediately afterwards, as the custom of prophets was, for forty days, from communion with men. He had since returned, and in Cana of Galilee won, by some exhibition of power or of wisdom, the confidence of His disciples ; for already He was beginning to gather round Him a little band of adherents, among whom the conviction appeared to be maturing itself that in Him they had found the Christ. A report of this nature could not fail to render the person to whom it related an object of more than curiosity—of anxious interest to the national council. And the consequence was, that throughout the whole of His after-life Jesus was watched by those in authority among His countrymen,—at first with wonder, not un-mixed with respect ; in the end with unmitigated hostility.

We have here the sum of all that appears to have been known of the genealogy and early life of Jesus by those who witnessed the commencement of His public career, and observed it to the end. From the world, till long after His resurrection, was withheld

the revelation of those wondrous truths which broke upon it when the Gospels of St Matthew and St Luke passed into the hands of the faithful. There can be no hesitation on the part of the most orthodox of believers to concede this point; because every statement that we find in the historical books of the New Testament, and not a few that are interspersed through the Epistles, substantiate the allegation. St Peter, for example, when he sought out Nathaniel, and imparted to him the glad tidings that the Messiah was found, gave that glorious title to "Jesus of Nazareth." As "Jesus of Nazareth" Christ stood before the judgment-seats of Pilate and of Herod; and over the cross on which He expired were written no record of tales assumed to be fabulous, but only these words, "This is the King of the Jews." It was of "Jesus of Nazareth" that on the day of Pentecost Peter spoke, as of "a man approved of God by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by Him"—as "taken, and by wicked hands crucified"—and as "raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be holden of it." In similar terms, when commissioned to carry comfort and religious instruction to Cornelius, the same Peter tells how God anointed "Jesus of Nazareth" with the Holy Ghost and with power, and raised Him up the third day, and showed Him openly. Such, too, was the language of St Paul at Antioch; of Apollos,



after he had himself been guided onward from John's baptism, at Ephesus ; and of every other teacher of whom mention is made in the Acts of the Apostles, as working for Christ with Peter, Paul, and Apollos. Are we then precluded from believing the sublime and touching accounts which the Church from a very early age has pronounced to be authentic, of the vision vouchsafed to Zacharias, of the angel's visit to Mary, of the birth in the stable at Bethlehem, of the adoration of the shepherds and of the magi, of the flight into Egypt, and the massacre of the innocents ? God forbid. These things commend themselves to the unhesitating acceptance of all who are content to "stand in the ways, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is." But for the present they must be to us as if a cloud hung over them, while we strive to ascertain through the words and acts of Christ Himself, not so much what He was and whence He came, as the purpose for which He lived and died, and the extent to which He accomplished it.

From the hour of His return into Galilee after the temptation in the wilderness, the life of Jesus is that of a man in close and constant communion with God. He is not, like Moses, constrained to recognise, through the medium of signs and wonders, God's presence near Him. Nor to Him, as to Abraham and the old prophets, does God come by fits and starts, so to speak, and after intervals of absence. God is

with Him always. He is the Son of God ; He is identified with the Supreme. His human sympathies are as large and as tender as human sympathies can be, yet never for a moment do they supersede the consciousness that all living things are loved, pitied, hated, dealt with in God and through God. The law to which His countrymen are obedient is to Him religious formalism and nothing more. All that is really great, noble, and morally good in it, He adopts and extends. Far beyond the utmost stretch of the imagination, either of the old lawgiver himself or the most rigid of his disciples, He spiritualises without condemning what they had handed down. He reverses no portion of the first table in the Decalogue, but He gives to each of the four commandments its full interpretation. God is not with Him the God of the Jews—He is the universal Father and preserver ; His worship is not to be confined to ceremonial pomp, and stated times and places. “God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” “The hour cometh, and now is, when neither in this place, nor yet in Jerusalem, shall men ” (exclusively) “worship the Father.” Not only is false swearing by Him prohibited, but the habit of swearing at all. Perfect truth on all men’s lips, perfect sincerity in all men’s actions,—this is His reading of the sentence which pronounces, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.” So also,

recognising the beneficence of the command which gives to man and beast one day of rest out of seven, He does not hesitate to base the requirement on its just foundation—"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." How just, likewise, and beautiful is His announcement, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: the kingdom of God is within you"! When the end of my mission shall have achieved its accomplishment,—when the whole moral being of men is so imbued with the sense of God's presence, that their highest enjoyment will be to live for God and with God—when not only shall incitements to moral wrong have lost their force, but the will itself shall have become trained to work only in the direction of moral right,—then, and not till then, can God's kingdom be fully established upon earth. Yet see with what consummate wisdom He prepares the way for this grand consummation! No speculative philosopher is He, refining, as Plato and Aristotle and Cicero did before Him, on the nature of God, and on the present and future condition of the human soul. He is a practical worker for that God whom He recognises in all things around Him, and of whose presence He is as perpetually conscious as a man can be conscious of his own existence. For this God—His heavenly Father—He sets Himself in earnest to build up a kingdom among men; and stands forth in consequence, at the very beginning of His public life, as at

once the framer of a polity or form of external government, and a lawgiver.

There was a positive necessity thus to act. By no other process could the light of truth be diffused, age by age, and generation after generation, through a world steeped, when the process began, in moral and religious darkness. Others before Christ had written and spoken well on religious and ethical subjects ; but for lack of a hierarchy specially appointed to teach as they had taught, and to do so with authority, their lessons either made no progress, except among the learned and the curious few, or else they gradually changed their character and degenerated into superstition. Even in Israel the pure theism of the patriarchs had become, as we have seen, a gross anthropomorphism ; therefore one of the first acts of the public life of Jesus was to gather round Him a little band of faithful men, to whom He might impart by degrees, as they were able to receive them, the truths which it was His mission to enunciate ; and on whom He could rely for guarding them against corruption, and proclaiming them through good report and through evil after He should have run His course. The powers thus intrusted to these chosen few were moral powers and nothing more. They received authority to explain, to exhort, to encourage, to reprove, to persuade, to advise, to meet and refute objections, when such should be raised, to the spirit of

their teaching, and to appoint coadjutors and successors, so that the work might be carried on to the end. But there their functions ceased. This, it will be observed, is a machinery such as we fail to discover in the schools either of Western or Eastern philosophy. It differs also from all the other religious hierarchies of which history makes mention. In Buddhism, in Brahminism, in the sacred things of ancient Egypt, we find special orders of men to whom were committed mysteries, into the nature and design of which all other classes were prohibited from inquiring. The Christian polity recognises no such distinction of castes. Its hierarchs are the teachers of moral truth, and of all moral truth. They hold back nothing from their fellow-men, whether they be high or low, rich or poor, ignorant or learned. They are, in point of fact, officials in a kingdom or commonwealth, of which God is the supreme Head, and wherein obedience to the laws, of which we have yet to make mention, can be enforced by moral suasion only. Whether this order of things be or be not imperfect in itself, is beside the question now under consideration. When the kingdom of God shall have been fully established upon earth—when the true meaning of the expression, “The kingdom of heaven is within you,” shall have been practically understood—then perhaps it may come to pass that each particular man shall be to himself a



sufficient teacher and guide. But so long as God's kingdom is still militant, fighting its way against ignorance and vice, the need of trained leaders to direct the operations of the war is self-evident; and in order to provide such leaders, Jesus settled the framework or polity of His Church first on the twelve apostles in subordination to Himself; and next on the apostles, and the seventy in subordination to them, when He should have run His earthly course.

We come next to inquire what further evidence the New Testament affords of a settled purpose on the part of Jesus to set up a kingdom or commonwealth among men which, though not of this world, should yet aspire to become universal, and to adapt itself to all the forms of civil government which human ingenuity might invent. Now, our only idea of a kingdom or commonwealth is that of a number of persons held together by the bond of a community of interests, and subjected for the general good to rules and regulations which, though here and there they may press hard, or seem to do so, on individuals, are yet everywhere accepted as just. The supreme ruler may be an autocrat, or an oligarchy, or an assembly representing the whole people, or a combination of the three; but in every case there must be law as well as magistrates, otherwise society will soon degenerate into anarchy, and its members resolve themselves into two classes, masters and slaves.

We have seen how Jesus arranged the external constitution of His kingdom or commonwealth. God is its supreme Head. Himself while He lives, with the twelve apostles—the apostles with the seventy disciples, when He quits the scene—are its jurists and magistrates. It remains to ascertain what the law to be administered is, and whether it be so laid down as to carry with it a clear forewarning of the inevitable consequences, to each separate member of the community, of obedience on the one hand and disobedience on the other. Where shall we discover such a law ? Look for it generally, and you will find that it evolves itself, so to speak, out of the whole of Christ's recorded conversation. Be content with a summary, and you have it in those chapters of St Matthew's Gospel which are usually spoken of as the Sermon on the Mount. Other sayings of Jesus abound in sentiments corresponding both with the spirit and the letter of what is there laid down ; but the Sermon on the Mount contains an embodiment of that perfect moral code which is the law of God's kingdom, and from the control of which no man, be his race and speech what they may, can with impunity cast himself free. Observe, too, that the delivery of the law is not postponed to a comparatively late period in the career of the Lawgiver. The roll of the future jurists is still incomplete when, in the hearing of a vast crowd, Jesus delivers Himself

of aphorisms which can never be recalled or reversed. Mark also the tone in which this new code of laws is spoken. There is nothing in the address of the speaker apologetic or explanatory. He assigns no reasons for what is affirmed ; He makes no attempt to justify His assertions by argument. Whatever may have been said by them of old, whatever oral traditions or written documents may have come down from antiquity, He overrides them all. "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery : but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old, Thou shalt not forswear thyself : but I say unto you, Swear not at all." "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth : but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil." Consider, also, how this grand address opens, and how it closes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God." Down before authoritative declarations like these go all the visions of

universal dominion under the reign of the Messiah to which His countrymen looked forward. Not to Jew only, but to Gentile also ; not to one kindred, nation, or speech, but to all speeches, nations, and kindreds are the doors of the kingdom of heaven thrown open. And that there may be no misapprehension in regard to the validity of these and other assurances, the whole are thus dogmatically summed up : “ Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock : and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell not : for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand : and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell : and great was the fall of it.” No wonder that those who heard Him said one to another, as the crowd melted away, “ He teaches as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

With these two important facts before us,—first, that Jesus made no secret of His intention to found a kingdom of God upon earth ; and next, that He accomplished His purpose by setting up a polity and promulgating a law, of which the former has been transmitted to our own times, and the latter is still

in full force, and will so continue till time shall be no more,—our next business will be to satisfy ourselves in regard to the impulse under which He acted; in other words, to ascertain, as exactly as the evidence at our command will allow, the character in which He presented Himself to mankind, and in virtue of which He claimed, not from His own generation alone, but from all generations, respect for His polity and obedience to His precepts. For nothing can be more certain than that casuistry, or subtle argument, was not the weapon wherewith He assailed popular error, either of belief or of practice. Throughout the whole of His public life He never once condescends to reason with a gainsayer. When asked to give a sign, such as shall satisfy His questioners that the divine commission which others attribute to Him is a reality, He declines to do so. When called to account for the interpretation which He has put on some particular doctrine, or challenged to show His right to teach as He taught, He either treats the demand with silent contempt, or meets it with a counter-question: “Tell us by what authority doest Thou these things, and who is he who gave Thee this authority? Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, and if you answer me, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.” “I speak not my own words, but the words of Him who sent me.”



That Jesus claimed to speak and to act for God, and by virtue of authority derived from God, is a point which admits of no disputation. So, also, it may perhaps be said, did all the ancient prophets. True; but there is a striking difference between their cases and His. The ancient prophets fortified every announcement made by them, whether it were dogmatic, prophetic, or admonitory, by words to this effect—"Thus saith the Lord." Jesus never once made use of the expression, or of any form of speech analogous to or resembling it. When Moses "went down unto the people" to deliver the old law of the Ten Commandments, he began thus: "God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage." When Jesus delivered to the crowds that waited upon Him the new law of the Messiah's kingdom, He ushered it in by pronouncing as from Himself certain beatitudes, each more touching and beautiful than the other. When Isaiah was consoling his people under their affliction, and holding out to them the prospect of better times, his speech runs thus: "Therefore saith the Lord, the mighty God of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies." How different is the tone of Christ's address to all in every age and every country, who, bowed down with the consciousness of sin and sorrow, know not where

to turn for sympathy ! “ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” In the day of Judah’s coming doom, when idolatry was rampant in palace and cottage alike, Jeremiah thus delivers his message of wrath : “ Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Because ye have not heard my words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the Lord, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and a hissing, and a perpetual desolation.” When Jesus looks upon the temple from the Mount of Olives, and foretells its destruction, He is content to say : “ As for these things which ye behold, the hour will come, in the which there will not be left one stone upon another which shall not be thrown down.” And so it is, from the beginning to the end. He speaks, He acts, He sets forth man’s duty, He constructs a commonwealth, and appoints to manage its affairs jurists and magistrates,—not like one commissioned by some superior authority to effect these ends, but by virtue of a power inherent in Himself. There is nothing like this in all history, sacred and profane. Whether we look to the East or to the West, to Persia and India or to Greece and Rome, the Gentile priest and seer, equally with the Jewish

prophet and lawgiver, never pretends to be more than the mouthpiece of the Deity whose will he undertakes to declare. Jesus alone, among moral and religious teachers, asserts the right to lay down rules for the guidance of human life, which, emanating from Himself, shall be binding upon all men, in every portion of the globe, and to the end of time.

On the other hand, this same Jesus who thus conducts Himself in His intercourse with men is described as frequent and earnest in His prayers to God. He does not enter upon His prophetic office till, like other Jewish prophets, He has spent forty days in solitary contemplation, in fasting, and devotion. After feeding five thousand men in the wilderness, it is stated: "When He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone." His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal has been preserved, and, like the expiring cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" it cannot fail to make a deep impression upon all who read it. "Not my will, but Thine be done." A noble sentiment—the very pith and essence of true religion—yet indicative of a purpose shaken by the near contemplation of mortal agony; and of a will, not adverse certainly, though scarcely in strict accord with that of the Supreme. How are we to reconcile these apparent

inconsistencies,—the absolute and independent power to determine how men shall live in communion with God—the weakness which shrinks from a terrible crisis, anticipated, though it had been, throughout an entire public career, and voluntarily accepted? We cannot pretend to reconcile these inconsistencies. Nothing could be easier than to say, that as perfect man, Christ was liable to all human infirmities; while as perfect God, He delivered Himself in His intercourse with men, as man had never done before. It may be so; but in assenting to this proposition, are we brought one whit nearer to the solution of a problem which in its very nature is insoluble? Take the expression literally, and apply it as we do, when speaking or thinking of some specific paternity, either of man or beast, and who will dare to affirm that in this sense it can be understood? That would be to degrade Christianity below the level of a worn-out and impure heathen mythology. Still, it seems impossible to doubt that Jesus was the Son of God, in some sense which the term will not bear, if applied to any other human being. And why seek to go further? Of that which underlies the nature both of God and man—of the substance of these natures, as in the jargon of the schools it is called—we know absolutely nothing. What then do we gain by first inventing a phraseology which, when we stop to analyse it, is felt to convey no distinct ideas to the mind, and then

persuading ourselves that in making use of it to define that which is undefinable, we render what we admit to be a great mystery, no mystery at all ?

It is essential to the consistency of every association of persons who, for whatever purpose or to whatever extent, separate themselves from the rest of the community, that certain symbols or signs shall be instituted whereby the claim of individuals to be admitted to the privilege of membership may be ratified. He who aspires to become free of a borough or a guild, must first of all take the oaths prescribed by the rules of the guild or the borough ; and the born citizen of one country can acquire naturalisation in another, only by fulfilling the conditions, whatever they may be, that are specified by law, in the land of his adoption. Judaism, being at once a religion and a nationality, was little permeated by the spirit of proselytism ; yet proselytes from others than the prescribed races were from time to time received,—if males, first by baptism, to be afterwards followed by circumcision ; if females, by baptism alone. The reception by these means of persons into their adopted nationality and religion was called by the Jews regeneration or second birth ; and so strict was the interpretation put upon the term, that every tie which had previously bound the convert to parents, or wife, or children, was *ipso facto* dissolved, unless the parents, wife, or children of the proselyte followed his example.



The practice of baptism was not, however, confined among the Jews to the case of converts from heathenism. Into schools or sects professing a more strict regard for the law than other sects, or binding their members to habits of life, self-denying, and, it might be, ascetic, applicants were admitted by baptism. Of this nature was the baptism of John, and probably also that of the disciples of Jesus, when in the lifetime of their Master they baptised in the towns and villages through which they passed, proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Baptism so administered had not, however, the force of baptism when administered to a heathen. It conferred no such privilege as a new birth;—how could it? The kingdom of heaven, or of God, in the language and estimation of the Jew, was the commonwealth of Israel, of which all the descendants of Abraham were already denizens, and in which they must abide, unless by expulsion from the synagogue, or by voluntary lapse into heathenism, they should forfeit their privilege. Hence the astonishment of Nicodemus, when, being a Jew himself and conversing with a Jew, he was told, “Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” But the Lord’s meaning was obvious. He had determined to adopt the well-known rite of baptism as the outward and visible sign of admission into His Church, which, when once formed, was to take the

place long held by Judaism, and to become for Jew and heathen alike the kingdom of God upon earth.

Here, then, was one of those badges established, by assuming which the subjects of Christ's kingdom, the citizens of Christ's commonwealth, were henceforth to be distinguished from other men. It was the first or preliminary badge to be received or worn once for all on the admission of the applicant into the Christian society. It stamped him as one born again into a new community, just as by a similar process the converted heathen used to be born into the religion and commonwealth of the Jews.

Something more, however, is required, if a guild or association is to be kept in constant remembrance of the purpose for which it exists, than the initiatory ceremonial by which individuals are admitted into membership. Among the Jews, the Paschal feast consummated, so to speak, the rite of circumcision; and, as in other respects, the Great Founder of Christianity built up the new kingdom of God upon the model of the old, so a solemn love-feast was by Him inaugurated which should appeal to the imaginations of Christians in all ages, as the feast of the Passover appealed to that of the Jews. Not that the institution of this sacrament released those who first partook of it from their allegiance to the Mosaic law, so long as obedience should be possible. In His own person, Jesus had been a punctual observer of the re-

ligious customs of His nation ; and His disciples, being Jews, continued, after they had entered upon the task of converting the world, to worship in the temple at the great festivals, just as their fathers had done before them. But the time was coming when the prophetic words of their Master should be accomplished ; and against that hour—against the final overthrow of the temple, and with it the fulfilment of the purpose for which temple and tabernacle had stood so long—a feast commemorative of Christ's death, and of the benefits conferred thereby upon mankind, was instituted. In what special light the sacramental bread and wine are to be regarded, or in what posture and accompanied by what accessories to be received, are matters with which we have here nothing to do. All that for the present concerns us is to point out that, as if for the purpose of testifying to the unbroken continuity of God's kingdom upon earth, the Christian commonwealth, which, by the express command of its Founder, is to struggle on till it shall comprehend all the nations upon earth, is both in its external constitution and in the symbolic rites which characterise it, a faithful copy of that older and less perfect kingdom towards which it stands in the relation of the full-grown oak to the acorn.

Thus far the similarity between the new kingdom of God and the old is complete : advance one step farther, and you see that they stand wide as the poles

asunder. The old kingdom of God, the Jewish theocracy, was, in the strictest sense of the expression, one of the kingdoms of this world. It had, as they have, its civil polity, as well as its religious organisation, though so entirely were these blended together, that the distinction which, in other communities, is recognised between offences against heaven and offences against the state, had for the Jew no existence. Within the limits of the Jewish commonwealth, the worship of any other God than Jehovah, neglect of the Sabbath-day, disobedience to parents, and a breach of the marriage vow, were as much punishable by the criminal law as theft, murder, or sedition. Again, the old kingdom of God upon earth had, like other kingdoms and commonwealths, its geographical boundaries. Its inhabitants were not less ardent patriots than the inhabitants of other states ; and patriotism with them, even more than elsewhere, implied an utter disregard to the honour and wellbeing of foreign countries, so long as by any means the greatness and supposed interests of their own could be promoted. But this is not all. So narrow was the spirit as well as the letter of the old theocratic constitution, that it bore with impatience the intermarriage of a Jew of either sex with a Gentile ; and held to be polluted any one who habitually ate and drank at the table of a Samaritan, of a Greek, or even of a Roman.

By both the letter and the spirit of the new theo-

cratic constitution, a principle of action the very opposite of all this is engendered. The kingdom of God upon earth, which Christ came to establish, recognises no hindrance to the most friendly relations between man and man, in any distinctions of lineage or language, or even of religion. It exists indeed for this, among other purposes, that it may gather the whole human race into one family, and refuses to be circumscribed within narrower limits than the compass of the habitable globe.

In another and not less important particular, the polity of the new kingdom contrasts forcibly with that of the old. Going beyond its predecessor in this, that while it prohibits not the actual commission of crime alone, but the encouragement of a desire, or even of a wish, tending in a criminal direction, it gives no authority to its jurists and magistrates, as such, to sit in judgment upon persons charged with offences, much less to punish them if found guilty. Nay, more,—through these same jurists and magistrates the new theocracy declares to criminals, whatever their offences may have been, that there is ready forgiveness for them, provided only they abandon their evil courses, and in the future conform their lives to the spirit of the laws which, in the past, they had disregarded. “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give



you rest." Churches and sects may forget this truth again, as they did in times past, but the truth remains unmoved and immovable, that not by means of stern repression, nor yet by violence in any shape, but by moral suasion only, are the limits of God's kingdom upon earth to be extended, and the obedience of its citizens secured to the revealed will of their great sovereign.

One more peculiarity, and a very striking one it is, may be noticed here, as distinguishing the citizenship of the Christian commonwealth from that of all other commonwealths the world has ever seen. It is, in its nature and effects, at once cosmopolitan and patriotic. Both by precept and example, Christ has taught His disciples that, in recognising the universal brotherhood of man, they do not release themselves from the obligations by which, as sons, fathers, and fellow-citizens, they are bound to the particular state or community of which they happen to be members. "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," is a form of speech as comprehensive in its meaning as the clause with which the sentence concludes—"and unto God the things that are God's." A like spirit breathes in the injunction laid upon Peter: "When thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee." Nay, war itself, cruel as it seems to be, and contrary to the spirit of Christ's law, is at least

passively sanctioned, if entered upon by command of an established government, and for a good cause. "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews." We say nothing of the terms in which the first preachers of Christianity discussed these subjects. They themselves offered no resistance to evil. They had entered upon a warfare, from the conduct of which carnal weapons were excluded. But while hazarding all, that they might win men to Christ, they guarded both themselves and their converts from being with justice accused of entertaining designs hostile to the government and established institutions of the empire. The Roman centurion was not required at his baptism to resign his military rank and abandon his eagles. "Render to all their due : tribute to whom tribute ; custom to whom custom ; honour to whom honour." "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake ; whether it be to the king, as supreme ; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well." Never was Christianity more maligned, than when accused of incompatibility with true patriotism and the devotion of men's best energies to the public service. In primitive times, and under peculiar circumstances in our own, a sharp line may be drawn

between the Christian's duty to God and his obligations as a citizen. The refusal to abjure Christ, or even to burn incense as a religious act on the altar of an idol, might be again, as it certainly was of old, treason to the state. Compliance with either requirement would certainly be treason to Christ. The Christian so circumstanced dares not hesitate which alternative to choose. But these are extreme cases, which have no bearing whatever on our argument, or the conclusion to which it leads. The conclusion is this: That in pursuance of a design, carefully formed and elaborately worked out, there arose upon the ruins of a theocracy, restricted in its limits, and in its purposes partial, because tentative merely, a universal theocracy, so constituted that, without interfering in the slightest degree with man's freedom of will, it constrains him, by moral pressure, to discern between good and evil, and holds out to him more than adequate inducements to choose the former and reject the latter.

## CHAPTER X.

CHRISTIANITY AND CIVIL GOVERNMENT—HOW THEY OPERATE ONE ON THE OTHER—CHRIST'S INJUNCTIONS, HOW TO BE READ—FUTURE REWARDS AND ETERNAL PUNISHMENTS—HOPE AND FEAR THE INSTRUMENTS BY WHICH CHARACTER IS FORMED, AND MEN TRAINED TO THE BUSINESS OF LIFE—EQUALLY APPLIED TO FIT THEM FOR A HIGHER STATE OF EXISTENCE—  
“COME, YE BLESSED OF MY FATHER”—“DEPART, YE CURSED.”

WE have seen with what consummate wisdom Christ adapted the polity of God's kingdom upon earth to the wants of all time, and to all conditions of human society. Whatever may be the forms of government which prevail in particular states, Christianity neither encroaches upon their legitimate rights nor seeks to undermine their authority. Wherever its doctrines are publicly professed, they doubtless colour the proceedings both of rulers and of subjects ; and in proportion as they are rightly understood, laws become humane in their administration as well as equitable in their spirit. But the influence thus exercised over the conduct of public affairs is indirect and occult, not direct and open. It operates first upon the man,

and next upon the statesman, moulding in private the individual character which is by-and-by to stamp its impression upon a household, a neighbourhood, a province, or an empire. The question therefore arises, What can the nature of this influence be, and how is it applied to control and direct the wills of those on whom it is brought to bear ? We will endeavour to answer this question in the same spirit of candour by which it has been our anxious desire to be guided throughout the whole of this inquiry.

The mission of Christ, as it is detailed and explained in the New Testament, embraced two main objects : first, to make clear to man the relation in which he stands towards God, and the duties arising therefrom ; and next, to remove from man's mind all doubt respecting that future life for which the present is to him a state of preparation. Towards the attainment of the former of these objects, Christ, by His own life and conversation, did all that it was possible to do, consistently with a regard to that absolute freedom of will which is an essential ingredient in man's nature. The latter He accomplished in full, by the only process which, with resistless and enduring effect, could bring conviction to the minds of all classes alike—the high and the low, the educated and the uneducated, the civilised and the savage, the child and the up-grown man.

Coincident with the progress of the first of these designs, went just such an exposition of the divine



nature and its mode of action as was necessary to make apparent to man the reasonableness of the service which is required of him. God, as revealed by Christ, is neither a mysterious abstraction nor the soul of the universe. He is a personal and ever-present God. The Father of spirits, He is much more than the creator and preserver of all things. He is the loving parent of the whole human race. In the prayer by which Christ taught His disciples to make known their wants to the object of their worship, God is there designated, Our Father which art in heaven. To the woman of Samaria He is further pronounced to be a Spirit, whom they that worship must worship in spirit and in truth. Beyond these limits the definition of the divine nature in the mouth of Christ never passes, and all that man is interested in knowing on the subject is surely comprehended under it. On the other hand, the will of God, in connection with man's inner and outer life, as well as the consequences to himself both of cheerful obedience and its opposite, are set forth with a distinctness which leaves nothing to be desired. Objections may be raised again, as they have been raised before, to certain special injunctions, which, unless universally acted upon, would subvert the whole order of society. But these are pushed aside at once, wherever there is candour enough to recognise the fitness of the Scriptural expression—"The letter

killeth ; it is the spirit that maketh alive." If, for example, the age be one of selfishness, litigiousness, cruelty, and greed, the moral teacher will assail these vices with peculiar acrimony, and inculcate in doing so a line of conduct to all appearance the very opposite of that which he condemns. But no thoughtful person believes for a moment that he is bound, except by the spirit of injunctions, which if obeyed in the letter must render life intolerable, except to those who systematically, and for an obvious purpose, disregard them. "Whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. If any man sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Take no thought for the morrow. Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor." He who fails to perceive that these and similar expressions imply nothing more than a severe condemnation of revenge, cruelty, and an over-anxiety to become and remain rich, will act with great inconsistency if he read otherwise than literally as they are written the commands, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee ; if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee."

All this, it will be said, may be true, but what defence do you propose to set up for the conditions

wherewith the laws of God's kingdom upon earth are sustained and enforced? You speak of human laws in terms comparatively slighting, because they appeal to fear, the basest principle of human action. But does not the law which you regard as divine appeal equally to fear, counterbalanced no doubt by the hope of reward, but a hope which is essentially and despicably selfish? And if the rewards promised, and the punishments threatened, be both of them for the present shrouded under a veil, are they not, if they be real, out of all proportion to the merits of the most upright of men on the one hand, and the demerits of the most depraved on the other? "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Awful words these, indicating a state of things from which the mind revolts with horror. Who can believe that an almighty Being, as beneficent as God is represented to be, who knows whereof we are made, and the strength of the temptations which assail us, will give over to eternal torments the miserable work of His own hands in retribution for a few years spent in sin, be it ever so rampant? Nor are the ideas both of God and man more worthy of respect which represent the Creator as bribing the creature to obedience by the promise of honour, glory, and immortality

hereafter ; and the creature as balancing a present against a future gain, and choosing the latter because he believes it to be the greater of the two. Rather let us hold with the Positivists that virtue is to the individual its own reward, and vice its own punishment : in the one case, because the virtuous man is contributing his share towards the perfecting of human nature, the true end for which he exists ; in the other, because the vicious man does his best to retard, if he cannot absolutely avert, that consummation. Thus all selfishness, whether of hope or fear, is excluded, and we live for duty, the sole spring of action, which to well-regulated minds commends itself as at once noble and efficient.

The objections thus raised to the teaching of Christ will, we think, appear, when fairly examined, to be as little formidable as the motive power suggested for the conduct of human affairs is visionary. Not that we would call in question either the nobleness or the efficiency of that spring of action which is expressed by the term duty. Neither can it be denied that within that very limited circle of minds which deserve to be spoken of as well regulated, duty has in every age supplied a motive strong enough to restrain from evil and direct to good. But how have matters gone in this respect—how must they for ever go—with the multitude ? Besides, obedience to duty, which you so highly and justly commend, is

not the result of intuition. It is the outcome of long and patient training—begun universally from without, and consummated and perfected by the habit of inward discipline. Now, is not all education from without conducted by constant appeals to the hopes and fears of the pupil? The first lesson taught to a child by a parent or a nurse is one of obedience, enforced on the one hand by caresses, on the other by reproofs. The schoolboy studies, if he be generous and aspiring, to gain the approval of his master, and to win a prize; if his nature be grovelling, and even dull, he still studies that he may escape punishment. In both cases, however, hope and fear are appealed to, because, except through these, no advance whatever can be made in the formation of character. Nor does the matter end here. Having outgrown the control of nurse and pedagogue alike, the youth enters upon the real business of life, warned both by his guardians and his own innate consciousness that prudence, self-denial, and diligence are necessary to success—that without them failure is inevitable. Thus in the anticipation of future good and future evil, man finds his motive spring of action at every stage of his existence except the last: and then comes the sure recompense of a life wisely or unwisely spent; honour and independence, with a quiet conscience, in the former case—poverty, disgrace, and bitter self-upbraiding in the latter.



If such be nature's universal law, under the guidance of which men are educated for the work of life, and sustained in conducting it, what ground of objection can be raised to the divine law which employs precisely the same means to effect an end similar up to a given point, only a thousand times more noble ? The hopes and fears which, in the one case, constitute our motive springs of action, as they contemplate only present and personal gain, or present and personal loss, so they render us indifferent to the success or failure of all who are not, by the ties of kindred or friendship, so intimately connected with us as to become, in point of fact, a portion of ourselves. Indeed we may go farther. Life under such conditions becomes, especially to those who feel their pressure most keenly, a game to be played out rather against than in harmony with all comers. We aspire to distinguish ourselves—to heap up wealth, to win titles, honours, and the leadership of men ; and for these ends we toil, it may be, through long years, staking health, credit, perhaps even self-respect itself, on the turn of the die. If we succeed, we do so at the expense of more or less of mortification to our competitors. If we fail, our own mortification hurries us into envy, malice, and a spirit of detraction towards those by whom we have been passed by.

The hopes and fears which, in the other case, look for their consummation in that future state towards

which the divine law turns our gaze, are absolutely free from these drawbacks. Indeed they cannot co-exist with envy, hatred, malice, and a spirit of detraction. They are active only in those who keep their hearts pure, their tempers under perfect control, their integrity unimpeachable, their whole demeanour open, candid, and generous. The natural law makes men disingenuous, grasping, often immoral, always selfish. The end for which the divine law exists is to encourage in men dispositions diametrically the reverse of these. "Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? when saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

It appears then, that, measuring both by the low standard of personal gain, the divine law holds out to all who may elect to be guided by it, advantages

far superior to those which come within the reach of the mere servant of the law of nature. For the divine law, as the above quotation proves, casts no hindrance in the way of ambition, provided the end to be achieved be a righteous end, and the means employed to attain to it generous and just. Only they who inherit, or by their own exertions earn, wealth, rank, and influence among men, have it in their power to relieve distress, and vindicate the course of justice, if it be perverted to the hurt of their less fortunate neighbours. On the other hand, the divine law instructs its servants how to bear prosperity with meekness, and adversity with resignation. If they be unable absolutely to hinder the growth of envy in those whom they have left behind in the race, at least they can mitigate its bitterness by the modesty of their own deportment. If they themselves be distanced, they accept without a murmur the decision of Providence, and make the most of it. But in truth this is scarcely the proper light in which to regard the subject. The prize of the high calling of which the apostle speaks—the kingdom prepared from the beginning of the world—is to the understanding mind not so much the reward of a life well spent as its consummation. Each victory which we achieve over that selfishness which hurries one into impurity, another into falsehood, a third into avarice, a fourth into the lust of power, makes us more meet to become partakers in

the inheritance of the saints in light. The man who lives rather for others than for himself, who finds his chief happiness in promoting the happiness of those around him, has already crossed the threshold of his Father's house in which there are many mansions. He has brought under the body which, though not evil in itself—for we have it upon high authority that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost—yet forms the channel through which enter lusts that war against the soul; and is thus in the beginning of that higher life the perfection of which “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.” Where, then, is caprice or guile on the part of the Creator? where a miserable balancing of future against present gain on the part of the creature? They are altogether excluded. The Creator, with equal wisdom and perspicuity, has made clear the way which conducts from a lower to a higher and still a higher state of moral and intellectual existence. The creature has only to pursue it with unwavering steps, and the issues come to him, so to speak, of their own accord.

Granting all this to be so, are we lifted by it over the obstacles which present themselves to a solution of the great problem? Not quite. Two important points still remain to be settled. The theory of rewards in a future state, as thus explained, is intelligible, and may be accepted; but what about future punishments? And the doctrines peculiar to Chris-

tianity, without subscribing to which councils, synods, creeds, and confessions of faith pronounce salvation to be impossible—are these to be ignored or explained away ? We will take these questions in the order in which they are put, and see whether or no satisfactory answers may not be found for them.

It would be uncandid to deny that the doctrine of eternal punishment, as it is taught in popular discourses and systems of theology, runs counter to all our notions of the perfect benevolence of Him in whom we live, and move, and have our being. Human society itself, in proportion as it becomes leavened with the spirit of Christianity, ceases to be cruel in its dealings with criminals. Crime must indeed be punished, otherwise neither life nor property would be safe ; but only barbarous rulers, Mohammedans, and pagans torture those who break their laws or excite their anger. In Christian communities, death itself is inflicted with the least possible amount of suffering to the doomed, even where the offence for which he suffers may have been murder under the most revolting circumstances. Is it, then, to be credited that the Father of Spirits, the God whose essence is love, will requite a brief lifetime of guilt with an eternity of torments ? And if this be incredible, what are we to make of the terrible phraseology with which the Scriptures of the New Testament are disfigured ?

If we take the phraseology in its most literal sense, there is still that to be said for the divine laws which



cannot be predicated of the wisest and most effective of human laws. At least they balance promises against threats, and the promises continue in force, notwithstanding frequent repetitions of offence, up to the last hour of the offender's visible existence. "Men and brethren, what shall we do? Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the Holy Ghost." "I came to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves; but if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." With human laws, the case is different; to them long-suffering is unknown. The first offence committed, detected, and brought home, brings its appointed punishment along with it, and the shadow of the prison or of the convict-ship darkens the whole of the criminal's after-career. The divine law stays its hand as soon as there is wrought in the offender a thorough change of mind. The human law once broken, leaves open no avenue to repentance.

Another peculiarity in the divine law which we fail to discover in human laws deserves to be noticed. It judges according to the condition and circumstances of the offender, rather than according to the nature of the actual guilt incurred. "The servant that knew his master's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes; the servant that knew

not his master's will and did it not, shall be beaten with few." It appears, then, that in spite of all that is said of everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels, the divine law breathes the very spirit of tenderness, even when it threatens. The parable of the prodigal son, the story of the lost sheep, the burden and refrain of every address delivered, or letter written, by those to whom the charge was committed of declaring their Master's will to the world, all point in the same direction. They repeat aloud what is said in whispers to the heart of the most depraved of mankind, that a life of sin brings with it neither happiness to the individual nor benefit to society ; and if the sole object of the divine threatenings be, as it obviously is, to reclaim the sinner, surely the charge of cruelty which the unthinking bring against them falls to the ground.

But perhaps it will be urged, that however logical this reasoning may be when brought to bear on one side of the question, it fails to satisfy the moment we endeavour to apply it to the other. It is jealousy of the nature of the Supreme Being, not of the effect of the policy attributed to Him, which forbids us to regard as coming from God a code of laws which would requite a brief life, even of obstinate and continuous crime, with an eternity of torture.

If this be all that stands between you and the acceptance of Christianity as a divine revelation, it may be said of you as it was said of the lawyer of

old, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven." In the first place, it is self-evident that the terms employed to describe the future of the utterly depraved are either metaphors or have no meaning at all. On that spiritual body wherewith we Christians believe that after death resuscitated man shall be clothed, neither the coarse element of fire nor the tooth of the worm can make any impression. The sufferings of the wicked, if they are to suffer at all, must be different from the agony which is produced by acute physical pain. Remorse, regret—vain, because it is profitless; the memory of opportunities thrown away, of warnings felt, yet cast wilfully behind; the conviction that we are not what we might have been, and would have been but for our own gross and grievous self-delusion,—do not the foretaste of these things come to all who have made shipwreck of their prospects here? And if the consciousness of identity which links the old man with the child, continue to link that which was once mortal with immortality, is there anything to complain of as cruel, or even unjust, if to the spirit purged of its grossness those truths be brought home which in a previous stage of existence failed to convince, and a condition of mind which was once intermittent and purposely brushed aside become chronic? In this case, as in the case of the just made perfect, the seed sown produces its natural and inevitable fruit. Habits stiffened by long use are hard to change in

time. What right have we to expect that they will become transformed in eternity? and if, besides this, in eternity the means be denied of gratifying impure tastes and appetites, possibly aggravated in their intensity, can a state of things be imagined at once more terrible or more strictly in agreement with the settled order of nature?

True, we shall be told—most true. But what do you gain by the concession? We have still eternity contrasted with time, the ocean with a cup of water; and an eternity of suffering, let it take what form it may, is surely no just retribution for threescore years and ten, spent, if that were possible, in an unbroken course of violence, impurity, and cruelty. And that course of action which we cannot defend on the score of bare justice, is manifestly incompatible with a belief in the perfect benevolence of Him who makes it His own. For man, be it remembered, according to your theory, is neither his own creator nor the product of blind chance. He comes into existence at the fiat of one who is hereafter to be his judge, and will have a perfect right to say, when sentence of everlasting perdition is passed upon him, Why am I here at all? I never asked for conscious existence: was it forced upon me in time, only that I might suffer throughout eternity?

Without admitting that there is the shadow of reasonableness in an argument which, if carried to its legitimate issue, would put an end to man's

moral responsibility altogether, every candid and careful student of the New Testament will admit, that both in the Gospels and the Epistles expressions may be found which go far to discredit, or at all events to render doubtful, the doctrine to which so many objections are taken. The whole tone of Christ's teaching is one of encouragement and hope. "The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." "The Son of man is come to seek and to save them that were lost." "This is a true saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." These and many similar phrases point distinctly to the one great purpose for which the Christian dispensation was granted. But there are others which bear even more distinctly upon the particular point under consideration. "Agree with thine adversary, whiles thou art in the way with him ; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt not come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." St Paul goes still further in his sublime description of the consummation of all things. "Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father ; when He shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies



under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." If the former of these statements do not imply that the payment of the debt is possible ; if the latter, that when the final account is taken, there shall be no more death,—it seems difficult to affix to them any meaning at all. Nor is it decisive of the point at issue to reiterate the stern words, "The worm that never dieth, and the fire that shall never be quenched." The language of the teacher in every age must be at once in harmony with popular opinion, and adapted to the mental capacities of those to whom he addresses himself. And ancient thought expressed in ancient language finds, as we have seen elsewhere, no direct response in modern thought expressed in modern language. Be this, however, as it may, one thing is certain, that in primitive times a belief in the eternity of suffering beyond the grave was nowhere exacted as a condition of admittance into the Church of Christ, and that in one only of the three creeds now in use is it dogmatically affirmed. The conclusion, therefore, to which we may venture to come is this. On a subject capable amid the darkness which surrounds it of more than one interpretation, the Christian is free to form his own judgment so long as he does not venture to impugn the vital truth that in that future state, for which the present is but a preparation, "every man shall receive according as he has done in the body, whether it be good or bad."

## CHAPTER XI.

PECULIAR DOGMAS OF CHRISTIANITY—CHRIST THE ATONEMENT—HOW  
TO BE UNDERSTOOD—CHRIST THE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND  
MAN—THE EXTENT OF BOTH THE ATONEMENT AND THE MEDI-  
ATION.

OF the creeds and confessions of faith set forth by councils and synods, whether of ancient or modern date, it would be foreign to the purpose of the present work to take any more cognisance than may be necessary to account for their existence. They are, of course, binding on the consciences of all who believe in the infallibility of Churches; but they offer no neutral ground on which thinkers of adverse schools may meet, with a view to soften down their differences, if they be unable wholly to remove them. We turn from them, therefore, in search of necessary dogma, to the New Testament itself, and especially to the recorded declarations of Him, whom men of all shades of opinion are agreed to accept as the most perfect moral teacher the world has ever seen. And if neither in these, nor in the apostolic letters,

which repeat and in some sort enlarge upon them, there be found anything which, when sifted to the bottom, can give just offence to reason—the judge of final appeal in all such cases—then may we confidently hope that, by little and little, charity will enlarge itself, and bitterness and anger enter no more into theological controversy than into discussions which have for their object the perfection of our knowledge in physical science.

You can put no faith whatever in the credibility of the Gospel—you must erase from the book of history all that it tells of the rise and early progress of Christianity—if you venture to deny, that from the commencement of His public career, and persistently to its close, Christ announced to His disciples, at first indirectly, but by-and-by directly, that He had come into the world “to give His life a ransom for many.” Equally explicit is the revelation which He makes of the results or consequences of this self-sacrifice. “From that time forth” (after He had received from the twelve a distinct avowal of their belief in Him as the promised Messiah) “began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” But much more than this is to follow: “I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and who-

soever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." We might multiply quotations to the same effect, were this necessary, but it is not. For each separate Gospel is impregnated, so to speak, with the dogma that Christ laid down His life that He might take it again, and in so doing bridge over for all men the chasm which had previously interposed between time and eternity.

In like manner, the Epistles, as often as they touch upon the subject, utter no uncertain sound. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

Again, somewhat obscurely perhaps in the Gospels, but without any circumlocution whatever in the Acts and in the Epistles, Christ is spoken of as a victim, and His death as a propitiatory sacrifice. John Baptist, pointing Him out to his own disciples, exclaims, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Christ Himself, in conversation with the twelve, refers to His coming cruci-

fixion in these words : "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Peter, called to account for a miracle of healing wrought upon an impotent man, explains the process of the cure, and draws a moral from it. "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone set at nought by you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other ; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Still more explicit are the declarations set forth in the Epistles of St Paul, St Peter, and St John. "If any man sin," says St John, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sins ; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." "Ye know," says St Peter, "that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers ; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." So likewise St Paul, writing to the Galatians and to the Romans, says : "In whom we have redemption through His blood." "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil



world, according to the will of God and our Father." "For this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and the living." "Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood ; to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past." And if, besides all this, we examine the Epistle to the Hebrews, we shall find that, from the beginning to the end, it is written to prove, that in Christ, the great victim slain from the foundation of the world, all the sacrificial rites heretofore in use among the Jews received their accomplishment.

With such evidence before us, it seems impossible to doubt that, long before the period of formal creeds and confessions of faith, a belief in the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross, and in its efficacy as the sole cause of man's reconciliation with God, was universal among the converts to Christianity. For the dogma of the atonement, therefore, with all its consequences, we are certainly not indebted to the decrees of councils. It is, in the strictest sense of the term, an apostolic dogma ; and assuming that the apostles taught in the spirit of the instruction which they had themselves received, the obvious inference is, that a belief in the doctrine of the atonement is essential to the profession of true

Christianity. Is there anything in the dogma to which solid objection can be taken, on the ground that it is antagonistic, either to the perfect justice and benevolence of God, or to the necessities of men ?

It would be affectation to deny that the doctrine of the atonement, as it is not unfrequently explained in systems even of orthodox theology, surrounds itself with difficulties, which appear to become only the more formidable in proportion as they are carefully examined. In human affairs there can be but one opinion as to the monstrous iniquity of vicarious punishment. By what perversion of thought or of language can we pronounce that to be merciful and just in God, which, by common consent, we denounce as both iniquitous and cruel if wrought by man ? For to Christ, who dies for the sins of the world, no unrighteousness is attributed. On the contrary, He is everywhere spoken of as without sin, as blameless and undefiled, as the just suffering for the unjust, that the unjust may be brought nearer to God. Are we not carried back by phraseology such as this to times of the deepest darkness, when to give the fruit of a man's body for the sin of his soul was held to be a meritorious act ? Yet is not the love of God for man extolled on this account above all others, that being the Father of Christ, the pure and immaculate, He spared not His own Son, but gave Him to be a

ransom and propitiation for the sins of the whole world ?

Undoubtedly we have in these expressions language which is strictly Scriptural ; and not less certain is it, that if read without taking into account the circumstances of the times, and the feelings of men before whose eyes the great event had just occurred, they may well startle, perhaps even offend, the more sober judgment of thinkers in this nineteenth century. But look at the matter subject to these conditions, and what follows ? The converted Jew, trained by his law to believe that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, would naturally see in Christ crucified the most majestic of sacrifices,—the realisation of what had been exhibited in types and shadows to his ancestors,—the lamb, without spot or blemish, slain at the Passover, and the heifer burnt without the camp. And as there can be no sacrifice without both a victim and a sacrificing priest, so God in this instance provides the victim ; and Christ, submitting Himself to His Father's will, assumes the twofold character of priest and victim. Hence, recognising the nature of the benefit secured, the apostle pours out his gratitude to the Most High in language which is at once intelligible to his co-religionists, and nowise offensive to the converted heathen, accustomed in other days to propitiate his deities by shedding innocent blood upon their altars.

Do not, however, stop there. Look more closely into the volume from which we are quoting, and you will find that never in the sense of one dragged to the stake against his will, or as in the case of a dumb animal unconscious of the fate that awaits him, is Christ spoken of, either by Himself or by the apostles. Freely, and with a perfect foreknowledge of the tragical end that is before Him, Christ devotes Himself to achieve a special purpose. For Him it is reserved to bring life and immortality to light; and though to accomplish that great end, He must of necessity pass through the valley of the shadow of death, He shrinks neither from the contemplation nor the reality of insults, of buffetings, of mock trials, of the crown of thorns, and of the cross. These, which His enemies heap upon Him as His shame, are to become His glory, never to be effaced in time or eternity. Does this act of stupendous self-sacrifice offend us, either in its relation to Him who achieves it, or to Providence which adapted the means to the end? We are not so affected in minor cases of the kind. Who ever speaks of Marcus Curtius, in the old Roman legend—of the three hundred Lacedæmonians dying with their front to the foe in the pass of Thermopylæ—of the noble band of English soldiers who went down in the Birkenhead, working calmly at the pumps to the last, in order that the women and children might be saved,—who ever speaks of these, or of the seven

brave citizens of Calais going forth with halters round their necks to appease the wrath of our own Edward, except in terms of unqualified admiration? And by whom are ever called in question the wisdom and generosity of those under whose immediate direction these deeds of heroism were performed? Must we reverse our judgment when called upon to contemplate the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross? His death was necessary as a prelude to His resurrection. The resurrection of one known to be dead could alone solve the problem of immortality; on the solution of that problem depended the regeneration of a world brilliant intellectually, yet sunk morally into the depths of degradation. Therefore was Christ led like a lamb to the slaughter,—therefore upon Him was laid the iniquity of us all,—therefore life was given for life—the humiliation of one for the elevation of many, in obedience to that eternal law which, among rational and free agents, ordains that the prosperity of the many shall in every case be best promoted by the self-denial, the voluntary toil, and sufferings of the few. What is there in the doctrine of the atonement thus explained to outrage his perception of moral right in the most sensitive of mankind?

If, on the subject of the atonement, the views of thinkers of various schools can, by reasoning such as this, be brought into something like accord, there is



little risk of their standing absolutely apart in the discussion of any other doctrine which is distinctly taught in the New Testament. We find, for example, that Christ claims to be not merely a mediator, but the sole mediator between God and man; and that the first teachers of Christianity are agreed in pressing this dogma upon their converts. But acquiescence in this claim does not compel us, who thankfully admit its validity, to believe that only they (comparatively few in number) who approach the Father through the Son, may hope for remission of their sins, and an entrance into life eternal. On the contrary, the New Testament teaches that the virtue of Christ's mediation is coextensive with the virtue of the atonement; and the atonement being of universal application, the mediation must, in like manner, be of universal application also. For Christ came into the world, not to set men right on certain subjects of abstract thought, but to show them, both by precept and example, that in waging a constant and successful war against selfishness, they at once elevate their own moral condition here, and make the best, and indeed the only preparation that can be made, for passing into a higher state of existence hereafter. Hence we feel justified in assuming that, in that house of which the Mediator and Redeemer speaks, a mansion will be found for all who, either ignorant of Christ's existence, or trained from their infancy to reject Him, yet

conform in their lives, even if it be but imperfectly, to that moral law which He left for the guidance of His Church—in other words, for the government of God's kingdom upon earth. Nay, more,—who shall venture to affirm that from the benefits of this blessed mediation even he shall be excluded who, after patient and dispassionate inquiry, finds himself unable to embrace the faith as it is set forth in the simplest of all known formularies—the Apostles' Creed?

Civilised man has long ceased to persecute his brother because of the opinions which he may entertain, so long as they do not issue in acts detrimental to the wellbeing of others. It would be impious to attribute to the God and Father of all a temper more malignant than we find in civilised man; and—which is more, perhaps, to our present purpose—we should contradict in so doing the declarations of Scripture: “I say unto you, that many shall come from the east, and from the west, and shall sit down in my Father's kingdom, while the children of the kingdom are cast out.” “God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation they who do His will shall be accepted of Him.” The doctrine of Christ's mediation, rightly understood, may therefore point to the fact, that between the creature and the Creator, whom to approach is impossible—because neither of the mode of His existence, nor of the manner of His acting, can the human mind form the scintilla of a conception—

a Being has in mercy been interposed, in His essence and motives of action as comprehensible to us as we are one to another, and so depicted in the pages of the New Testament, as at once to command our human sympathies, and to become the object of our purest and most perfect devotion. Jesus Christ is this Being, by the common admission of all educated thinkers, whether they recognise the divinity of His origin, or see in Him only the perfection of humanity. In either case, they are at one in accepting the rule of life which He has set before them as the most perfect the world has ever seen. And if they make that rule of life the pole-star of their own existence, do they not equally acknowledge—in some instances perhaps half unconsciously—that He does indeed stand between them and the unapproachable Self-existent,—that He is indeed a mediator, and the sole mediator, between God and man ?

## CHAPTER XII.

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY COULD BE OFFERED AT FIRST ONLY TO JEWS  
—CAUSES OF ITS EARLY SUCCESS AND SUBSEQUENT FAILURE IN  
THAT QUARTER—ST PAUL ASSERTS THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE  
DISPENSATION—HIS HISTORY AND OPINIONS—THE CONSEQUENCES  
OF HIS CRUSADE AGAINST THE LAW—IS HE ANSWERABLE FOR  
ANY SCHEME OF SALVATION NOW IN EXISTENCE?—WHAT THE  
SCRIPTURES TEACH WHEN READ WITH CARE.

SUCH was the Christian religion as first offered to the world by those who drew their inspiration direct from the fountain-head. The one special dogma presented for acceptance was a belief in Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah ; the one practical lesson taught, that in consequence of this belief, they who professed it should walk henceforth in conformity with God's will, as the Messiah had made it known. The terms in which this special dogma was enunciated may seem occasionally to have varied ; because Jesus is called in the New Testament sometimes the Son of God, sometimes the Son of man, sometimes the Son of David, sometimes only the Christ. But these forms of speech, if not strictly synonymous, are but

different modes of expressing the same thing—*i.e.*, that He to whom they were applied was, in the opinion of the person or persons so applying them, the long-expected Deliverer of Israel, the Anointed of God, in whom prophecy had received its accomplishment. This is proved by the form of adjuration employed by the high priest: "I adjure thee by the living God to tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Nobody can suppose that the high priest put any other meaning on the expression "Son of God."

It is obvious that a faith based so entirely on Jewish tradition could at the outset be presented only to persons conversant with the Jewish Scriptures, and themselves either Jews by descent or converts to Judaism. We accordingly find, that so long as their Lord was with them, the twelve and the seventy had it in charge to preach the Gospel to none except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. We further find, that on the day of Pentecost "there were dwelling at Jerusalem devout men out of every nation under heaven,"—in other words, that Jerusalem was crowded with Jews and proselytes from many lands, whom the return of one of the great national festivals had called up from their distant homes to pay their devotions in the temple. It is to be observed that to these immigrants exclusively, and to the settled inhabitants of



the city, the twelve addressed themselves. But something more is noteworthy in this case. If from among all races of men, Jews and converts to Judaism were alone open to argument on the great question then brought under public notice, it is certain that they were at the same time the very last persons in the world whom pleaders for Christianity, sustained by no force more potent than natural eloquence, might hope to bring over to their own way of thinking. Jewish tradition was indeed strong on the subject of the Messiah, but it knew nothing about a Messiah doomed to humiliation and suffering. Jews read the promises made to the fathers eagerly, but they read them literally, as they had been spoken and placed upon record. They might be ready to take up arms whenever the expected deliverer should arise, ushered in by signs and wonders, or otherwise so manifested as to command their confidence. But such revelations as the apostles made to them—the application of prophecy to the career of one born amid the lowly, brought up in comparative poverty, going about in the character of a teacher of righteousness, and dying on a cross—is it to be conceived that the claim put forward for such a one to be accepted as the Messiah, could have met, however ingeniously urged, with any other reception than universal contempt? Yet we are told in the book of the Acts—and the truth of the statement has never, as far as we know,

been disputed—that “the same day there were added unto them above three thousand souls.”

Be it so, it may be answered ; but astounding as the results of the first preaching of Christianity appear to have been, a good deal is still wanting to satisfy a candid inquirer that the work of conversion was miraculous, and the conversion itself either real or enduring. We discover, as we go on with the story, that the views of Christianity entertained by the three thousand souls were most incorrect, and that an explicit declaration of the truth produced at once general discontent among the whole body, and in many particular instances apostasy itself. Nay, more,—it is past dispute that the twelve themselves not only did nothing for a while to remove these misconceptions from the minds of the converts, but rather encouraged, if they did not positively share in them. And nothing can be more certain than that the final abandonment of the mistaken views in question stood very seriously in the way of the future conversion, we do not say of the Jews as a nation, but of any considerable number of the Jewish people. You ask how, except by divine support, Christianity could have made way at all among persons taught from their infancy to encourage hopes which the religion offered to them by the apostles overthrew. We in our turn wish to know whence it comes about that a religion, based upon their own sacred writings,

and, according to orthodox interpretation, clearly and distinctly growing out of them, should, by the very people from whom we borrow these writings, be rejected as a fable.

The objection thus raised may be specious, but it carries no real weight with it. St Paul, indeed, meets and overthrows it in a single sentence in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians — “ Even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.” Nor, taking into account the details of their wondrous history, from the call of Abraham down to the final dispersion, is it surprising that the veil which hindered the Jews of St Paul’s day from seeing through the shadow to the reality, should be before the faces of their descendants still? Doubtless its effect upon the mental vision of the primitive converts was somewhat different from that which it exercises over the reasoning faculties of the Jews of our own age. It shuts out from the latter every ray of light, of which the effect might be to dispel the delusion and break down the prejudice which keeps them where they are. It did not prevent the former from believing that upon ancient prophecy the apostles were inspired to put a more just interpretation than was given to it by the Scribes and Pharisees and doctors of the law. And if these converts from Judaism failed at once to discern the whole truth, the terms in which the truth was presented to them sufficiently account for

the circumstance. They were called upon to accept Jesus, crucified, dead, and risen again, as the Messiah. No doubt, in obeying the call they must abandon dreams of immediate temporal greatness—of the throne of David established in Sion, and secured to the end of time against disaster. But the glory of their nation was not on that account to pass away. Through the preaching of the Gospel, their law—the law of Moses, with its endless rites and ceremonies and conventionalities—was to become the law of the whole world. Had not their divine Master promised as much ? Was it not recorded as spoken by Him, “Think not I am come to destroy the law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” ? And if the absolute realisation of this assurance might be deferred till the day when He should come again in power and great glory, was it not certain that then at least Judaism would become the universal polity and religion of mankind ? and did not this conviction impose the duty upon His disciples to co-operate with their Lord by requiring that every Gentile, before or after his admission into the Church, should be circumcised, and become obedient to the whole law ? That this prejudice extended at first to the apostles themselves needs no demonstration at our hands. Whether its continued prevalence among the Jews lies at the root of their national rejection of Christianity we cannot pretend to say. But the notion is at least

plausible, inasmuch as conversions from Judaism became rare in primitive times as soon as communion with the Church of Christ was pronounced by authority to be incompatible with a belief that obedience to the old law was necessary to salvation. And the modern Jew, if he be an Israelite without guile, can entertain no idea of the universal kingdom of the Messiah, except as a government of which the chief seat shall be in Sion, and the law the same that was delivered by Moses to the fathers in the wilderness.

To St Paul belongs the merit of striking the first decisive blow against a prejudice, the confirmation of which must have defeated the main purpose for which Christ lived, and taught, and suffered. Christianity bound up with Judaism could have made no progress except among Jews; and the gulf which had thus long interposed between time and eternity would have remained for ever to the bulk of mankind open and unbridged. Nevertheless, pre-eminently useful as the labours of the great apostle are admitted to have been, it is just as certain that mainly from his writings—in part misunderstood, in part wilfully perverted—were evolved not a few of the errors both of faith and practice which stole into the early Church, and of which some hold their ground to the present day. That such perversions of the truth were inevitable under the circumstances amid which Christianity was first offered to the world, every re-



flecting man, to whatever school of thought he may belong, will probably acknowledge. We bring no charge, therefore, against St Paul, by confessing that in his zeal to confute one ruinous mistake he became the involuntary cause of other mistakes, less fatal to the immediate spread of that Gospel of which he was the champion, but by no means lightly to be accounted of either in their immediate or remote consequences. A word or two of explanation will make our meaning clear on this subject.

The original twelve were men of no repute among their countrymen. Destitute of education they certainly were not: the law laid upon every Jew the obligation that he should have his children taught to read intelligently the Scriptures of the Old Testament in the vernacular tongue. Taken from a class which, though below the highest, cannot be said to have formed part of the lowest stratum in Jewish society, the twelve were, for their condition in life, well-educated men. It is clear that they must have made the Prophets, as well as the Law, their frequent study, otherwise they would not have been found among the early followers of the Baptist or of Christ. But beyond an acquaintance with the sacred books their knowledge of Jewish literature appears scarcely to have gone, and of the literature and philosophy of foreign countries they knew nothing. Like others of their fellow-citizens engaged in trade, they had indeed

acquired a perfunctory knowledge of Greek ; but they probably spoke, as they unquestionably wrote it, with strongly - marked Syriac idioms, nor ever quoted except from the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, which had become in their day the textbook of the nation.

To assume that in any age the effect of divine inspiration on the mind of man must be to fill it with knowledge on all subjects, is entirely to misapprehend, as we have elsewhere shown, the purpose for which inspiration is granted. Trained by three years of personal intercourse with their Lord, the twelve set about the work of converting their countrymen, strong in the conviction that they were instruments in God's hands, and convinced that He would give them strength to meet and overcome opposition. Being Jews, they spoke to Jews in terms which Jews could understand, and achieved their successes by arguments, which, if addressed to persons ignorant of the Jewish Scriptures, must have fallen dead upon their ears. Imagine St Peter delivering in the Roman Forum the speech which on the day of Pentecost produced such an astonishing effect in Jerusalem ! We know that St Paul achieved but slender success by the appeal which he made to the Athenians in the Areopagus, though he approached his subject with consummate skill, and quoted their own poets in support of one at least of his asseverations. The ruder speech of Peter or of

James, with references to authors of whom the Athenians had never before heard, would have brought down upon the preacher the ridicule of his audience, if, indeed, he could have succeeded in collecting an audience at all.

Not all their zeal, not all their devotion, not all the support which they derived from the assurance that God was with them, could have enabled the twelve, however ably seconded by such men as Stephen and Philip, to carry the glad tidings of salvation beyond the limits of the Jewish Church. Of this fact we find ample proof in the hesitation wherewith St Peter admitted Cornelius into communion with the faithful ; and in the murmurs of disapproval, not without difficulty suppressed, with which the announcement of this first success in a new direction was received at Jerusalem. Nor is it any argument on the other side to urge that the Samaritans received the word gladly ; or that the Ethiopian noble, taught by Philip how to understand aright a particular passage in Isaiah, was, on professing his belief that Jesus was the Son of God, baptised, and sent on his way rejoicing. The Ethiopian noble was evidently a proselyte of the gate ; he would not otherwise have undertaken a tedious journey to Jerusalem, and certainly would not have been found by Philip reading the prophets as he travelled homewards : and the Samaritans, as need scarcely be ob-

served, were equally with the Jews circumcised and obedient to the law. But the glad tidings of salvation were meant to be addressed to every people and nation on the earth's surface ; and the same wisdom which provided instruments for laying the foundations of the Christian Church on the site of the old temple, provided others for carrying the building far beyond it. St Paul was the first and greatest of these instruments, and nobly he executed the task assigned to him.

A native of Tarsus, the son of a man who, though a Hebrew by birth, had obtained the high honour of Roman citizenship, Saul, or as he came afterwards to be called, Paul, received an education which fitted him to play a distinguished part in any sphere of life to which he might be admitted. His father appears to have earned wealth, as well as credit, by executing justly a contract for supplying tents to the Roman army quartered in Syria ; and his family took, in consequence, a place among the magnates of the province. Of the other members of the household, if other members there were, we know nothing. But Saul, in the public schools of Tarsus, was initiated into the philosophy as well of the East as of the West, and made extensive acquaintance with the literature both of Greece and of Rome. From Tarsus he removed to Jerusalem, where he became a pupil of Gamaliel, the most celebrated Jewish teacher of his

day, and learned from him to read systematically, not only the Law and the Prophets, but the commentaries on both, which were then held in the highest repute in Jewish seminaries. How this intimate acquaintance with the whole range of Hebrew theology led him to regard the preachers of the new faith, the book of the Acts of the Apostles informs us. And the same book tells that, in the midst of a career of persecution, he was suddenly arrested, and became thenceforth the boldest and ablest advocate of that pure and simple religious system which at one time he had striven to put down.

Of St Paul's manner of teaching by word of mouth, only a few specimens have been preserved. Like the other apostles, he addressed himself exclusively, in the first instance, to Jews. But between his reasoning, as he spoke in the synagogue at Pisidia, and the appeal of St Peter to his countrymen on the day of Pentecost, there is a difference as marked as between the Epistle to the Romans and the more homely letters of St Peter, St James, and St John. St Peter made his appeal in support of the Messiahship of Jesus to those on whom the law was binding, through David, the great vindicator of the law. St Paul told such as trusted in the law for justification before God, that there was an end to this state of things; and that "through this Man" (Jesus raised from the dead) "is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins,



and by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." St Peter's address won over in a single day three thousand souls to Christianity. The effect of St Paul's preaching was to provoke controversy and tumult among those who heard it, and to wring from him and his fellow-labourer Barnabas the memorable declaration : "It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you ; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

Impetuous, brave, and resolute, St Paul never deviated by a hair's-breadth from the line which, in the synagogue at Pisidia, he had announced his determination to follow. In the council of Jerusalem, if the meeting held in that city to decide between his views and those of the legalists may be so called, he bore down all opposition, being supported, indeed, though feebly, by St Peter, who told the tale of the conversion of Cornelius, and drew from it an inference which at a subsequent period he seems to have either forgotten or ignored. From that meeting St Paul went away rejoicing, and spread abroad wherever he came the glad tidings, that "the yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear was not to be put on the necks of the disciples." But the same consequences followed from the pertinacity with

which he pursued his favourite subject, that are apt to attend an excess of zeal in any cause, be it ever so righteous. Like other reformers of a system, whether of philosophy or religion, he overlooked the fact that the process of eradicating one crying evil, if it be persevered in with excessive vehemence, is not unapt to open the way for the introduction of other evils, different in kind, yet possibly not less pernicious. St Paul's constant denunciation of the law, and of the works of the law—the contrast which he perpetually drew between faith and works, entirely to the elevation of the former, entirely to the degradation of the latter,—led ere long to a division among the disciples, even more dangerous, because more enduring in its consequences, than the old strife between Jew and Gentile. Men arose who, affecting profound reverence for his doctrine, held that belief in Jesus as their own Saviour in particular was sufficient of itself to insure acceptance before God. In their lives they might have been, and might continue to be impure and unholy. What then ? “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound ;” “their names were written in the Lamb's book of life ;” and “justified by faith, they had found peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Another consequence of St Paul's mode of teaching was the gradual building up in the Church of that “scheme of salvation,” with a gross caricature of

which the author of 'Supernatural Religion,' professing to write as a philosopher, has thought it not unbecoming to disfigure his pages. Now it is quite unfair to strike at the religion of Christ through any "scheme of salvation" or "system of theology" other than that which Christ Himself laid down. We who believe in the divine mission of Christ are not followers of St Paul but of Christ; and if it can be shown that Paul has advanced opinions for which no support is to be found either in the letters of his brother apostles or in the doctrines of their common Lord, then we must not hesitate to pronounce St Paul to be in error. But is this really so? or has it not rather come to pass that, forgetting the great end of which St Paul never lost sight, they who succeeded him as rulers in the Church drew from his argumentative writings inferences which he never intended them to convey? It may be well to look at the important issue raised by these questions from both points of view.

1. He who reads the New Testament either carelessly or with a mind warped by prejudice, will reply without hesitation that St Paul does teach doctrines which are not to be deduced either from the recorded deliverances of Christ Himself, or from the genuine letters of St James, St Peter, and St John. Not once is Christ represented in the Gospels as alluding in connection with His own mission to the Fall and its

assumed consequences. Over and over again He speaks of Himself as the appointed mediator between God and man, as the light of the world, as the resurrection and the life, as the future judge of mankind. But of the paradisiacal state, of the first covenant, and of the effect of its violation on the whole human race, He never, as far as can be gathered from the text of the four Gospels, takes the smallest notice. On these heads the book of the Acts is equally silent ; and we search in vain for a direct reference to them in the General Epistle of St James, in the first of St Peter and of St John—and, indeed, in any of the Epistles which, whether genuine or otherwise, have found their way into our canon of Scripture. St Paul, on the other hand, appears to be eloquent on these subjects. His constant cry is, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God ;” and the cause of this universal depravity is given. “By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.” Take the well-known passage in the 5th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and say whether it may not be so read as to give ample support to the scheme of which a use so unworthy has been made : “As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. . . . Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation ; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men

unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners ; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Take also an expression equally strong in the Epistle to the Ephesians : " You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins ; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience : among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind ; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. . . . For by grace are ye saved through faith ; and that not of yourselves : it is the gift of God : not of works, lest any man should boast." We might quote many other sentences from almost all his letters, which, if read without reference to the context, and in forgetfulness of the peculiar temperament and designs of the man, would lead to the conclusion that St Paul's views of the great Master's mission differed essentially from those set forth everywhere else in the New Testament. But the moment we honestly strive to put ourselves in his place, the conviction is forced upon us that whatever the errors may be which a subsequent age grafted upon his teaching, for these the apostle of the Gentiles is not responsible.

2. The great object which St Paul, subsequently



to his conversion, kept steadily before him, was to bring about a cordial understanding between Jews and Gentiles, by uniting them in the bond of a common Christianity. From the Gentiles he met with little or no opposition ; his great difficulty lay with the Jews. The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms were of paramount authority with them, only so far as they vouched for Israel's special election ; and beyond the range of what they appeared to teach on that head, the rest of the apostles scarcely ventured to go. St Paul took a bolder course. He reminded both Jew and Gentile that they sprang from the same root. Upon the Jews in particular he impressed the fact that the promise made to the founder of their race had anticipated the law by upwards of four centuries, and that, according to their own sacred books, this same promise was but a repetition of another, given darkly indeed, yet not so as to be meaningless, long before the first migration from the original settlement of the human family began. Thus, writing as a Jew to Jews, he demonstrated that the call of Abraham was nothing more than a preparatory step towards the accomplishment of a purpose beneficial alike to Jew and Gentile. "The promise," he says, "that he should be the heir of the world was not to Abraham, or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." And more than this : he shows by reference to their own

prophets that the Jews, as a people, stood not less in need than the heathen nations of that which was offered to all by the Gospel of Christ. "Are we, then, better than they? No, in no wise; for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

The temptation and fall of the first pair was to the Jews of St Paul's day, if not an article of faith in the strictest meaning of the term, at all events a tradition based upon the Mosaic history of the creation, and on that account accepted as an indisputable fact in history. St Paul took advantage of this national conviction to push home an argument which might have otherwise failed to serve his purpose. You admit, he reasoned, that from Adam and Eve all the families of mankind are descended. You cannot, therefore, deny that the same nature which is in you is also in the Gentile; and that God who is the Father of one section of His creatures, is likewise the Father of the other. You know, besides, that, in common with the Gentiles, you are subject to death, and you believe that death passed upon all men through the primeval transgression. If, then, the Gentiles stand precisely on the same ground with you

—so far as both are injuriously affected by a common calamity—is it consistent with a just appreciation of the nature of the Supreme Being, that, when applying a remedy to this common calamity, He should make any distinction between you and the rest of His creatures on no other ground than that you happen to have derived your descent from Adam through Abraham, and they through other lines less carefully trained than yourselves to welcome the universal Redeemer when He should appear ? If there were in you any portion of Abraham's spirit, you would rejoice that to your generation it has been given, not only to behold the fulfilment of the law, in the triumph of Christ over the grave, but to become instruments in the hands of God for bringing your Gentile brethren into a relationship with Him as intimate as your own.

All this, we may be told, is at least plausible, and to a certain extent true, since St Paul's anxiety to break down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile cannot be questioned. But how much nearer are we brought by it to a removal of the obstacle which his manner of expressing himself seems to interpose between Christian doctrine and common-sense ? If St Paul does not teach that the guilt of Adam's transgression was either inherited by his descendants or imputed to them, what does he mean by such phrases as these : “ By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation ; ”

“By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners”? And what is really signified by the still more tremendous declaration : “As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”?

How these expressions are interpreted in popular systems of theology we all know. Our business is not, however, with popular systems of theology, but with the language of Scripture itself, in which, as it appears to us, there is nothing to startle or offend any thoughtful man who believes in God, and in the active operation of His providence.

The words made use of by St Paul in the passages just quoted,\* signify in the New Testament, like their relative terms in the Old, just as often the consequences of guilt or an expiation or atonement for guilt, as guilt itself. When we read, for example (2 Cor. v. 21), that God made Christ, who knew no sin, sin for us, it cannot be supposed that St Paul meant to trifle with his readers, or to contradict himself in the same sentence on a very grave subject. All that he does is to employ one and the same word in two senses, both familiar to those to whom he was writing,—in the sense of real sin or guilt when he says that Christ knew no sin; in the sense of suffering for sin when he says that Christ was made sin for us. A similar use is repeatedly made of the

\* ‘*Ἀμαρτία, ἁμαρτάνω.*

same Greek word in the Septuagint version, and of the term equivalent to it in the Hebrew Bible. Thus Aaron is commanded to lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and to confess over him all the transgressions of the children of Israel, and all their iniquities, putting them upon the head of the goat, and sending him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness ; and it is added, "The goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities." Jeremiah, in like manner, represents the Jewish captives in Babylon thus describing themselves and their fathers : "Our fathers have sinned, and are not ; and we have borne their iniquities." In each of these cases, and in many more which we need not pause to specify, the term "sin" is employed to denote the consequences of sin as these affected persons, themselves innocent, yet suffering because of the sins of others.

Read St Paul's declarations thus, and they will amount to a statement—by himself believed to be literally true, and never called in question by his countrymen—that Adam's transgression involved his posterity, not in the guilt of an act which they certainly did not perpetrate, but in the penalty attached to it, whatever that might be. The question therefore arises, What were the consequences of this particular transgression, not as they are laid down in any system of theology, whether of ancient or modern growth, but as they are described in the Scriptures of



the Old and New Testaments, carefully considered and rendered into correct English.

In the 2d chapter of Genesis we read : “ And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat : but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it ; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” The Hebrew words employed on this occasion, and rendered by our translators “ thou shalt surely die,” occur upwards of thirty times in the Pentateuch. In every other case, just as in this, they are reduplicated — the reduplicate form being used to denote the certainty with which punishment shall follow the offence.\* Now, assuming the several books of which the Pentateuch is composed to have been equally written by Moses, it cannot be doubted that the meaning of any particular word or expression contained in them must be the same wherever it occurs—that the expression, “ thou shalt surely die,” or “ death shall surely be inflicted,” must signify the same thing, whether we find it in the 2d chapter of Genesis, or the 19th of Exodus, or the 24th of Leviticus, or the 35th of Numbers. Let the reader consult his Bible—the Hebrew Bible if he be a Hebraist, the Septuagint translation if he

\* The words in question are *מוֹת חָטוּת*, and we find them used in Gen. ii. 17, iii. 4, xx. 7, xxvi. 11 ; Exod. xix. 12, 15, xxi. 12, 15, 16, 17, xxii. 19, xxxi. 14, 15 ; Lev. xx. 2, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 27, xxiv. 16, 17, xxvii. 29 ; Num. xv. 35, xxvi. 65, xxxv. 17, 21, 31.

be a Greek scholar, or our own authorised version if the dead languages be strange to him—and he will see that everywhere, except in the 2d and 3d chapters of Genesis, the phrase in question is incapable of bearing any other interpretation than that which we put upon the sentence of an English judge, when at some assize he condemns a prisoner to be taken to the place of execution, and there hanged by the neck till he be dead. What right have we to affix to it, in these two instances, a meaning different from that which it can alone be made to bear in any of the twenty-eight supplementary instances enumerated below ? There is nothing in the analogies of language, or in common-sense, to justify such a proceeding. And thus the monstrous notion, that the fall of the first pair involved the whole human race in eternal perdition, passes with its endless self-contradictions into the region of absurdities. The penalty attached to the breach of the primeval command, as we find it recorded in the 2d and 3d chapters of Genesis, was in the strictest sense analogous to that threatened by Abimelech against such of his people as should molest Isaac or his wife—to the fate which was to overtake man or beast if he touched the mount—to the punishment awarded by the law to him who cursed father or mother—and to that which the Sabbath-breaker in the wilderness actually underwent when the people, by the command of Moses, stoned him with stones till he died.

The Mosaic record, whether we read it literally or as a sublime metaphor, is a beautiful story, pregnant with meaning. Literally read, it amounts to this : A pair of human beings are introduced by the Creator into a state of probation which shall fit them in due time for entrance into a higher state of existence. Their fidelity to their benefactor is tested by a simple process adapted to the simplicity of their manner of life. Of the endless variety of fruits which surround them, they are permitted and invited to make free use ; one alone is forbidden, and they are warned that in the event of disregard to this restriction they shall surely die. They eat the fruit, and the penalty is incurred. From that hour man becomes, like every other animated thing on earth, in air, and in water—mortal. What he might have risen to be, had the original pair observed this special injunction, we are not told. But the terms in which the Creator passes sentence of death upon Adam, convicted, leaves no room for doubt respecting the condition to which his disobedience had reduced the man, and through him his descendants in all time coming, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

That St Paul took this view of the Fall and its consequences is proved to demonstration by the terms which he employs when contrasting the calamity with the remedy applied to it. In the fifteenth chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, he

argues thus : "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." We have no limitation set here to the extent either of the catastrophe or of its antidote. As the former came upon all alike, Jew and Gentile, virtuous and vicious, civilised and barbarous, through the misconduct of their common ancestor, so the latter is shared in by all, without distinction, through the self-devotion of their common benefactor. But elsewhere St Paul is still more explicit in defining the nature of the death thus incurred and thus abolished. Among the Corinthian converts there would appear to have been some who denied the possibility of a general resurrection. "If Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection from the dead?" Are not these men chargeable with gross self-contradiction? They profess to believe on our assurance that Christ rose from the dead, yet they put from them the necessary inference that just as Christ rose, so shall all men rise to receive the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad. "If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised : and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain ; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." Let

the reader turn up his Greek Testament, and he will find that the word rendered by our translators "perished,"\* means utterly and totally extinguished—that something is blotted out, so to speak, from the roll of created things, and become as if it had never been.

The author of 'Supernatural Religion' is therefore grossly in error when he attributes to Christianity a dogma so hideous as that a just and merciful God, inflamed with fury because of the transgression of the first man and first woman, condemned not the guilty pair alone, but all their descendants, to eternal torments in hell. Reading the history literally as it is written, we gather from it this, and no more, that on creatures not naturally immortal (for the Bible tells us that in Him—that is, in God—alone is immortality) the universal Father bestowed the boon of a never-ending existence, on condition that they would abstain from the commission of one special act—that the condition on which they held their charter of immortality was violated—that the Creator withdrew from them the free gift which they had shown themselves incapable of appreciating, and restored it again to their descendants only when the fulness of time arrived; in other words, when a large portion of the human family had become sufficiently enlightened to put its true value upon a boon so precious, and to recognise the

\* 'Απώλοντο.



wisdom as well as the completeness of the process by which their title to it was established, never again to be forfeited.

Perhaps there is in all this not a little to which thinkers of the school of M. Renan and the author of 'Ecce Homo' may find it difficult to give their hearty assent. So be it ; but at all events the theory sets the scheme of redemption free from the heavy charge, that it is inconsistent throughout with a just conception of the nature and attributes of God. If, in the plenitude of His goodness and wisdom, the Creator saw fit to people the earth with living creatures rising one above another in degrees of perfection—if on man, the highest of them all, He bestowed reason, free-will, and a moral sense, and if the effect of these endowments was to render man capable both of continued advancement and its opposite—what course of proceeding can be imagined more consistent with the divine attributes than that the opportunity should be afforded to man of testing this freedom of choice, without which there could be no scope for the exercise either of his reason or his moral sense ? Now this is precisely what the Christian scheme, based more explicitly perhaps upon St Paul's teaching than upon that of Christ Himself, represents God to have done. Adam and Eve in Paradise are in a school of probation. They are encouraged to choose the right and reject the wrong, by

the hope of a future good on the one hand, and the dread of a future evil on the other. But however perceptible the motives may be which sway them in one direction, they are feeble in comparison with that which impels them to go forward in an opposite direction. The temptation to disobey is immediate, pressing, and urgent ; the hope and fear which oppose themselves to the temptation are contingent, hazy, and remote. Of life as it is, with its passions and appetites, they are conscious ; neither of immortality nor of death can they form a conception. They yield to the craving which is upon them, and learn when too late that sin is the parent of death. Henceforth sacred history, if read in a spirit of candour, becomes a record of events testifying to the unwavering goodness of the great Creator. Man's nature is not changed ; he is still worked upon to act, by the motive which presents itself with the greatest force to his will. But the fountain-head whence the stream of life issues has been polluted ; and ages of discipline are necessary so to strengthen man's reason, and nurture his moral sense, that on each occasion when some immediate gratification comes within his reach, he shall be able to weigh the consequences wisely, before either grasping the proffered boon or rejecting it. But this can never be till man is convinced that in the present life he is fitting himself for another which shall be either infinitely higher or

infinitely lower, according to the uses to which he applies the talents with which God has endowed him. Now we look in vain for any assurance to this effect elsewhere than in the Gospel of Christ. Natural religion, if such a thing there be, may awaken hope in the reflecting few ; but even for them it can do no more. Brahminism lands us at the best in absorption, Buddhism in virtual annihilation. From the paradise promised by Mohammed every reasonable man turns away with disgust, and the superstitions of savage tribes are unworthy of notice. What remains ? Either we must hold fast by Christianity with all its mysteries—and they are neither so numerous nor so perplexing as popular orthodoxy represents them to be—or we must resign ourselves to materialism, of which the general acceptance will soon bring on just such a cloud of moral darkness as shrouded the world till the Sun of righteousness arose with healing in His wings, to break in upon and disperse it for ever.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE CREEDS—THEIR ORIGIN—NUMEROUS AFTER THE FIRST CENTURY—THE APOSTLES' CREED—THE NICENE CREED—THE ATHANASIAN CREED—THE CREED NOT INTRODUCED INTO LITURGIES TILL THE FIFTH CENTURY IN THE EAST, TILL MUCH LATER IN THE WEST—THE ATHANASIAN CREED CLOSES THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY—PELAGIUS AND CELESTIUS OPPOSED BY JEROME AND AUGUSTINE—"THE SCHEME OF REDEMPTION"—HOW INTERPRETED BY OPPOSITE SCHOOLS—"CREEDS" AND "THE SCHEME OF REDEMPTION" CONNECTED WITH CHRISTIANITY INDIRECTLY—A SOLUTION TO THE GREAT PROBLEM MAY BE FOUND IN THE PREPARATIONS MADE FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST, AND THE INFLUENCE FOR GOOD EXERCISED BY THE GOSPEL—FAITH IN CHRIST NOT NECESSARILY DEPENDENT ON A BELIEF IN MIRACLES—THE GOSPEL TRUSTWORTHY BECAUSE OF ITS PERFECT ADAPTATION TO MAN'S WANTS, AND THE SATISFACTORY EVIDENCE AFFORDED BY IT TO A FUTURE STATE.

So long as the duty of propagating the Gospel was superintended by apostles and apostolic men, we hear nothing of creeds formally drawn up, and imposed upon the Church as tests of the orthodoxy of its members. Certain dogmas, or articles of belief, were indeed submitted from the first to candidates for baptism, and these, we may rest assured, were everywhere in spirit, if not in letter, the same. But never till the personal followers of our Lord had disappeared

from the scene, and the work begun by them passed into less able hands, was it judged either necessary or expedient to define in writing more minutely than had been done by Christ and His apostles what in the region of pure belief was necessary to salvation. The legend which describes a meeting of the twelve previously to their dispersion, and their joint composition of a symbol to be used in common by all, may be dismissed at once as destitute of any foundation in fact. Had such a meeting been held, and such a document been produced, it is inconceivable that no reference whatever would have been made to the circumstance, either in the book of the Acts or in the Epistles. Both, however, are completely silent on the subject, as every inquirer who takes the trouble to read them through will discover for himself.

The truth is, that the adoption of creeds or symbols, determining on abstract points of faith what must and what must not be believed, was forced by degrees on the Church as a defensive, not in any instance taken up as an offensive, measure. From the tenor of St Paul's writings, it is, indeed, evident that even in his day the process of corrupting Gospel truth had begun; and we know that St John lived long enough to deplore and contend against the progress which the evil was making. But not till after the possibility was taken away of referring disputed questions to the arbitrament of those who had per-



sonally conversed with the Messiah were the heads of the Church driven to controvert, one by one, tenets which proved dangerous, in proportion as they were represented to be in unison with apostolic teaching. We do injustice, therefore, to the memory of the Fathers, if we put out of view the fact that, in surrounding primitive truth with safeguards, which may, perhaps, appear to us to obscure as much as to throw light upon it, they but obeyed a necessity which they believed to be urgent. Nor must we forget that all the controversies which for seven centuries or more disturbed the peace of the Church had their rise in the East ; that the genius of the East was eighteen hundred years ago, as it still is, intensely metaphysical ; and that subtleties advanced in support of one set of opinions could be met, with any prospect of success, only by advancing subtleties quite as transcendental in support of their opposites.

Of the causes which operated to force upon the heads of the Church the policy of which we are speaking, some account has been given elsewhere. There is a charm even in our own times for cultivated intellects in speculations which turn upon the mysteries of being. In the times which immediately preceded and followed the birth of Christ this charm was at once more generally felt, and was in its nature far more engrossing. The Greek mind in particular acknowledged its power, especially after it became

inoculated with the spirit of the remoter East ; and with the Greek mind thus orientalised, Christianity no sooner passed the limits of Palestine than it came in contact. It has been shown how in Alexandria, in Antioch, and in Ephesus, schools existed, wherein men were taught to seek for truth, and more or less to find it, in every system of philosophy then known. By the learners in those schools, Christianity, so far from being rejected or treated with contempt, was hailed as another to be added to the many sources whence wisdom might be expected to issue ; and the more mysterious the revelations which it made of matters transcending the grasp of human reason, the more it commended itself to the acceptance of the sages. It is obvious that such a state of public opinion could not fail both to open a way to the more rapid progress of the Gospel, and to dim its lustre. For though the religion of Christ had its origin among a Syrian people, and its divine Author spoke an Aramaic dialect, it may with truth be said to have been a Greek religion from the first. "Its primal records," says Dean Milman, "were all, or nearly all, written in the Greek language. It was promulgated with the greatest rapidity and success among nations either Greek by descent, or those which had been Græcised by the conquests of Alexander. Its most flourishing churches were in Greek cities : Greek was the commercial language in which the Jews, through

whom it was first disseminated, and who were even now settled in almost every province of the Roman world, carried on their intercourse. Primitive Christianity no doubt continued to speak in Syriac to vast numbers of disciples in those provinces. It spread eastward to a considerable extent in Babylonia and beyond the Euphrates—into regions where Greek ceased to be the common tongue. Oriental influences—influences even from the remoter East—worked into its doctrines and into its system, yet even these flowed in chiefly or in great part through Greek elements. The Indian monasticism had already been domiciliated in Palestine; and among the Egyptian Jews, oriental and Egyptian notions had found their way into Greek philosophy. Among the earlier Christian converts were some of these partially orientalised Greek philosophers. Many of the first teachers had been trained in their schools. In Antioch, in Alexandria, and even in Ephesus, there was something of the Asiatic cast in the Greek civilisation.”

The student of ecclesiastical history need scarcely be reminded, that previously to the death of the last survivor of the apostles, the Christians had begun to found seminaries in various places for the education of young men intended for the office of the ministry. Alexandria was the seat of the most celebrated of these seminaries, in which able men, most of them tinctured with the prevalent philosophies, became

teachers. These believing, or professing to believe, all that the apostles had taught, believed also that truth was diffused in varying proportions through every existing school of thought ; and that it was the duty of wise men, and especially of Christian teachers, to collect from every quarter its scattered elements, and to employ them reunited in the defence of religion, and in the overthrow of the dominion of impiety and vice. Christian eclectics of this stamp had so much in common with other eclectics, that they held the philosophy of Plato to be superior to that of all other masters ; and treated his views of God, of the soul of man, and of things invisible, as if they were in perfect conformity with the spirit and genius of Christian doctrine.

Christianity, thus taught, necessarily disposed its votaries to hear with complacency whatever might be said by men not avowedly hostile to their own system. Among these we may specify one Cerinthus, by birth a Jew, who, as early as the very beginning of the second century, if not at the close of the first, propounded a theory which aimed at combining in one the doctrines of Christ, the opinions of the Jews, and the absurdities of Gnosticism. He taught that the creator of this world emanated from the Supreme God ; that he was the sovereign of the Jews, and their lawgiver ; that he had originally been endowed with every excellence, but fell by degrees

from his native virtue and primitive dignity ; that the Supreme determined, in consequence, to destroy his empire, and sent down from the Pleroma for this purpose one of the glorious æons, called Christ ; that Christ descended in the form of a dove, and united himself with Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary, at his baptism in the Jordan ; that Jesus, thus strengthened, waged vigorous war against the God of the Jews, at whose suggestion he was arrested and crucified ; that immediately on the arrest of Jesus, Christ separated himself from him, and returned to the Pleroma ; and hence, that only the man Jesus became subject to a painful and ignominious death. The moral which Cerinthus drew from this wild creed was, that men should worship the Supreme God and Father of Christ in conjunction with the Son ; and that, abjuring the God of the Jews, yet holding fast certain portions of the Mosaic law, they should give all diligence to regulate their lives according to the precepts which Christ had delivered. Such as adopted his views were promised the resurrection of their bodies, and a thousand years to be spent in exquisite enjoyment whenever Christ, reunited to Jesus, should return to reign in Jerusalem ; and finally, at the close of that space of time, that they should be received into the Pleroma, there to dwell for ever in happiness with the happiest of the æons.

We content ourselves with giving in detail the



views of Cerinthus, because, monstrous as they appear to us to be, they are reasonable in comparison with the opinions attributed to his contemporaries, Minander and Nicolaus. Both of these men, Christians in name, believed in two first principles—the principle of good, and the principle of evil; in æons, in the Pleroma, and other absurdities of Gnosticism. But the one declared himself to be the promised deliverer—the æon appointed to free this lower world from the dominion of the demons; while the other, by denying that through the body the soul could be polluted, gave perfect sanction to the grossest immorality.

Cerinthus first taught in Alexandria, Minander in Samaria. Of Nicolaus, the birthplace is uncertain. After them arose Saturninus in Antioch, Cerdo and Marcion in Rome, Bardesanes in Edessa, and Tatian in Assyria. All of these undertook to blend together Asiatic Gnosticism and Christianity. But besides them, we find a host of Egyptian Gnostics, who differed from the orientalists thus far, that while admitting the self-existence and eternity of matter, they acknowledged only one Supreme God, and entirely discredited the principle of evil. It would be tedious, if indeed it were possible, to describe minutely the processes by which they laboured to reconcile their views with Christian doctrine. But the substance of their teaching seems to have been

this: That two distinct persons were united in Jesus of Nazareth—that of the man Jesus and that of Christ the Son of God; that the divine nature entered into the man Jesus at his baptism, and quitted him when he was seized in the garden of Gethsemane; that the Christ or divine part of Jesus was clothed in a visible body, which it still retains, and will for ever retain in the Pleroma. Their theory of creation—of the agency of angelic beings in effecting and afterwards corrupting it, and of the mission of Christ to bring order out of confusion—would little edify were it set forth at large. We content ourselves, therefore, with stating that, as taught by Basilides, Carpocritus, and Valentinus, it spread from Alexandria to Rome; and from Rome, with marvellous rapidity, through Europe, Africa, and a large portion of Asia.

Besides these two sections of Gnostics, there arose in the second century a third or purely Greek school of thought, which denied that there was any real distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and held that the Supreme Being Himself became united to the human nature of Christ, and suffered on the cross. Praxias, Theodotus, and Artemas were the three great teachers of this doctrine, and Rome was the scene of their common labours; yet among them there are shades of difference. Praxias took the bolder step, whence his followers were known as

Monarchists or Patripassians. Theodotus and Artemas went no further than to teach that at the birth of the man Christ, not the Supreme Being bodily, but only a certain divine energy or portion of the divine nature, united itself with him.

We make no apology for bringing under the notice of the reader this brief abstract of the history of ancient thought, because thus only can we hope to make him understand whence it came about that they whose sole object it was to guard the doctrine of the Gospel from corruption, were driven to hedge it in with dogmas, apprehensible no doubt by the faculty of faith, but lying entirely, indeed necessarily, outside the sphere of human reason. Peter, Philip, Stephen, Paul, Apollos, were content, when delivering their message of peace, to set forth in very simple terms the "principles of the doctrine of Christ." The fulness of time had brought with it the accomplishment of the divine promise. The Christ or Messiah was come, in whose name men were invited to "repent from dead works," to "have faith in God," to be united with the Saviour by baptism and the "laying on of hands," and to look forward with confidence to the "resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment." Such at least is the analysis afforded in the Epistle to the Hebrews (chap. vi.) of the "principles of the doctrine of Christ;" and it is in strict agreement with that famous discourse

which, on the day of Pentecost, told how "Jesus had God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses; therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." But language which sufficed to carry conviction to the minds of persons conversant with the Hebrew Scriptures, and indifferent to all literature besides, served only to provoke to further inquiry men educated in the schools of Asiatic, Egyptian, and Greek philosophy. In what sense is this Jesus of whom you speak the Son of God? By what process could the divine and human natures become united in him? How and by whom was a world created in which evil, physical and moral, is more in the ascendant than good? and who or what is this Holy Ghost, in whose gifts you invite us to participate? These and other questions arising out of, or connected with them, became in process of time as much subjects of controversy within the Church as without it.

It was in the effort to stem this tide of a perilous logomachy, that the process originated of compiling and putting into circulation brief but specific statements of what was pronounced to be a summary of the faith once delivered to the saints. Numerous documents of the sort came early into existence in the East, where almost every bishop or chief pastor of

a district or diocese drew up a symbol of his own for the guidance of his clergy, and the instruction of the catechumens whom they might be preparing for baptism. It would be waste of time to notice the great bulk even of those which have come down to us in the writings of the Fathers. But three demand our special attention, in part because they obtained general if not universal acceptance long ago ; in part because they are still retained as enunciating the belief of the universal Church in the nineteenth century. The symbols in question are the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and that commonly called the Creed of St Athanasius, each conspicuously in accord with the spirit of the age which witnessed its rise and growth to maturity.

The Apostles' Creed, as we now call it, is undoubtedly the most ancient of the three. At what precise date a beginning was made in its composition, and where it first came into use, are points undetermined ; but we know that about the middle of the second century it was adopted in Rome, and received in consequence the title indifferently of the Latin and the Apostolic Creed. The twofold object of its original articles was at once to refute the Gnostic heresy, and to condemn the polytheism of unlettered pagans. At first its proportions were comparatively narrow. It affirmed the unity of the Godhead ; the exercise of creative power by God alone ; the Sonship and Lordship of Jesus



Christ ; His crucifixion, death, and resurrection ; His ascension and coming again to judge the quick and the dead ; and the active operation of the Holy Ghost. The clauses which run thus, "He was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary," appear to have been introduced at a later period. The articles referring to the descent into hell, to the holy catholic Church, and the communion of saints, were not added till after the conversion of Constantine.

Adopted by the Roman Church, this particular symbol became by degrees, and continued ever after to be, the common creed of Western Christendom. Meanwhile, Neoplatonism took in the East a new direction, and, guided first by Manicheus and by Arius, raised fresh obstacles to the progress and triumph of pure Christianity. By Manicheus the theory of two gods—the one good and the other evil—was revived ; by Arius a divine nature was conceded to Christ, but only in a secondary or subordinate degree. But the political and social condition of the Church was by this time very different from what it used to be, and heresy began in consequence to be assailed with weapons more telling than had been wielded by the apostles and their immediate successors. To the clergy as a body, and especially to the bishops, was already conceded towards the laity some such place as had been yielded in pagan times to priests and augurs. This is not to be wondered at, because

till the conversion of Constantine comparatively few of the governing classes gave in, except in secret, their adhesion to the new faith. But that which was begun in times of danger went forward at an accelerated pace in times of safety. With the sanction of the emperor, the bishops took it upon themselves, sometimes singly, each within his own diocese, sometimes in provincial conclaves, to determine how the faithful were to read the Scriptures, and what doctrines were to be gathered from them. At last, in the year 325, a meeting of the entire hierarchal body was called, in order that, after due deliberation, a form of faith should be drawn up and go forth to the world as the judgment of the Church on all disputed points of doctrine, final and irreversible. Now we must not put out of view the state of utter confusion in which, by the mixing up of pagan philosophy with Gospel truth, the minds of men were at that time immersed. Ebionites, Nazarenes, and Gnostics had been the precursors of the Elixai, of the disciples of Cerdo and Marcion, of the Valentinians and Hermogenites, as they in their turn were succeeded by Manicheans, Noatians, Sabellians, and finally by Arians. All these, though distorting the Christian verities so as to bring them into agreement with their separate views, professed to be believers in Christ, and by the subtlety of the arguments with which they maintained their respective opinions, reduced Christianity to the level of a great meta-

physical problem. It was to cut this Gordian knot, by declaring once for all what the Church did and what she did not believe, that the Council of Nicæa came together; and if in the symbol then produced there are subtleties scarcely less refined than those against which they were directed, the result is surely not different, taking into account the circumstances of time and place, from what might have been expected. In the ecclesiastical history of Socrates, Book I., chap. viii., the reader will find the original of the Nicene Creed as it was first produced. Subjoined is a literal translation :—

“We believe in one God, the Omnipotent Father, the Creator of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord, Jesus Christ begotten, the one begotten of the Father,—that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made; consubstantial with the Father, by whom all things were made which are in heaven and in earth; who, on account of us men, and for our salvation, came down, became incarnate, and suffered; He ascended into heaven, and will come again that He may judge the quick and the dead. We believe in the Holy Ghost.”

There the Creed ends, for the sentence which follows goes no further than to anathematise all who should presume to hold, much more to express, opinions

adverse to those which the Church had pronounced to be based on revelation.

The Nicene Creed, as originally adopted, continued in force only till A.D. 381. It was then revised and enlarged by the Council, as it came to be called, of Constantinople, which, without changing the name, gave to it the form which among all the orthodox Churches of the East it still retains. The "Filioque" clause which we find in our liturgy was added some thirty years later by the Council of Bracara, and became, in course of time, an integral portion of the Creed as it was received by the Latin or Western Church all over the world.

We come now to the Athanasian Creed, concerning both the authorship and the exact date of which it is impossible to speak with any degree of certainty. That it was not compiled by St Athanasius himself seems now to be universally admitted. Whether the legend be deserving of credit which attributes the performance to Vigilius Tapsensis, an African bishop who lived towards the end of the fifth century, is a point on which we express no opinion. This much, however, appears to be certain, that Latin was the tongue in which the document came first before the world; that the Latinity is free from those peculiarities of style which are discernible in the literary compositions of all men who think in one language and write in another; and hence, that for the real

author, whosoever he may be, we must look, not among the Greek, but among the Latin fathers.

Again, authorities are not agreed respecting the precise time when the symbol in question was first recognised by the Church as embodying the doctrine held by Athanasius in his world-wide dispute with the Arians. By some this event is dated back as far as the sixth century ; others, on grounds at least as plausible, place it in the seventh ; others bring it down to the eighth. The question in debate is of the least possible importance, provided due weight be given to the circumstances under which the recognition took place. Long before the most ancient of the dates for which theorists contend, Arius had passed from the scene. His reading of the Christian verities did not, however, die with him. There arose after his demise a succession of heresiarchs, each more extravagant in his views than the other, and yet all alike masters of the sort of rhetoric which, in the days of which we are speaking, passed current for the language of philosophy. Nestorians and Eutychians in the fifth century, Monophysites and Tritheists in the sixth, Monothelites in the seventh, with many more, the bare repetition of whose names would weary the English reader, carried on the strife of tongues, to the great scandal of all true believers. It was in the first instance against Arianism as Arius himself had taught it—in the next,



against the doctrines of his imitators, of whom many did scant justice to the opinions of their master,—that the Athanasian Creed was fulminated. We measure the effect of its promulgation by a very false standard if we look only to the impression which its dogmatism makes upon ourselves. For the age to which it appealed, the Athanasian Creed was the end of all controversy. Heretics were expelled or withdrew beyond the limits of the empire. Churchmen everywhere bowed their heads and kept silence when the awful words were repeated in their ears, “He therefore who wills to be saved must thus think of the Trinity.”

Determined as the Church was, as soon as she could count upon effective support from the civil power, to fix a uniform standard of faith for her children, she wisely abstained for more than four hundred years from too much familiarising the unlearned among them with the text of the symbols through which it was conveyed. To persons under instruction preparatory to baptism, the Nicene Creed in the East, the Apostles’ Creed in the West, was submitted and carefully explained. Bishops also were required in both branches of the Church catholic to repeat the Nicene Creed previously to their consecration; but not till about the middle of the fifth century in the East, and till a period still later in the West, can any trace be discovered of the practice which now prevails of repeating the Creed as a con-

stituent portion of the liturgy or daily service of the Church. Nor is it difficult to discover a plausible—may we not go farther, and venture to say a sufficient—reason for this reticence. Documents which enunciate points to be believed appeal either to men's intellectual capacities or to "the faculty of faith" which is inherent in them. In neither case have they anything in common with the spirit of devotion which impels men, in the language of prayer and thanksgiving, to make known their wants and express their gratitude to the Author of their being. Indeed it is quite possible that the intrusion of such documents into a liturgy may interrupt, perhaps disperse, the devotional feeling in many, by compelling them publicly to declare their assent to propositions which they may have lacked the opportunity fully to investigate, or the subject of which they may hold too sacred for human language to define. Be this, however, as it may, there is ample evidence to prove that the Latin Church long and stoutly opposed the innovation; that an attempt to introduce it into the French liturgies during the reign of Charlemagne was censured by Pope Leo III.; and that only in the eleventh century, when pressure from without became too great for further resistance, could the Vatican be prevailed upon to sanction a custom which thenceforth became universal.

Disputes concerning the nature of the Supreme

Being, the divinity of Christ, the personality of the Holy Ghost, may be said to have been closed, both in the East and in the West, so far as the catholic Church had power to close them, by the promulgation of the Nicene and the Athanasian Creeds. Other controversies had, however, risen about matters scarcely less abstruse, though more intimately connected with man's condition and prospects here and hereafter. We have elsewhere shown how St Paul, in his anxiety to break down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, made use of language which, by ignorant or designing persons, might easily be made to bear an interpretation such as he never intended it to convey. To this fact, indeed, and to the evils arising out of it, direct allusion is made in the 2d General Epistle of St Peter, which, whether we receive it as genuine or spurious, is unquestionably as old as the latter part of the first century. Not only was it contended, on the authority of St Paul, that salvation comes exclusively of faith whether the life be pure or impure, but appeals were made to his writings in support of views which, on the subjects of predestination, original sin, hereditary guilt, and grace, more resembled the principles of Gnosticism, modified by Christianity, than the pure and simple doctrine of Christ, as set forth in the Gospels. How far these views extended in the course of the first four centuries it is not very easy to determine ; but

before the middle of the fifth they were reduced to a system, under circumstances on which it seems necessary to touch, though with the greatest possible brevity.

While the faithful, relieved in some sort from the Arian controversy, were speculating on the chances of that disruption which at a later period occurred between the Eastern and Western Churches, there came to Rome, and took up their abode there, two monks, the one a Briton by birth, the other said to be a native of Ireland. Their names were Pelagius and Celestius. If we may hazard a conjecture, based upon what is told of their lineage, we should say that they had paid little attention in their youth to the Gnostic and Manichean controversies. But however this may have been, they appear to have earned an excellent repute for piety and virtue in the city of their adoption, where they continued to reside, and to propagate their views unmolested, till forced by the approach of the Goths, A.D. 410, to escape, first into Sicily and afterwards into Africa.

Pelagius and Celestius have both been branded as heretics, and the fate which in those early days overtook all heretical writings was of course assigned to theirs. It is therefore impossible to say with any approach to certainty what either of them personally taught. But their doctrine, whatever it might have been, drew down upon them the wrath of Jerome,

and called into play the dialectic skill of his more able and less irascible contemporary, St Augustin. Jerome heaped, as was his wont in like cases, personal abuse upon Pelagius. Augustin addressed himself to refute the Pelagian heresy, and did so in treatises which, if it be too much to say of them that they constructed that "scheme of salvation" which provokes the ridicule of sceptics, and gives pain to many a true believer, prepared the way for its general, though certainly not its authoritative, acceptance at a subsequent period by the entire Western Church. St Augustin writes as men are apt to do who adopt a theory against which their natural instincts rebel. He affirms dogmatically the doctrine of predestination, yet labours to show that individuals are not affected by it. His disciples broke up at once into two antagonistic schools, each of which pushed the doctrine of their master to an extreme. Both were agreed in this, that without the grace of God salvation is impossible. But while one party contended that saving grace is dispensed only to those whom God had from all eternity elected to life, the other held that grace is freely offered to all, and that all who comply with the terms of the Gospel will be saved. On other points, likewise, these Augustinian divines maintained contrary opinions. According to one side, the Fall itself, with all its dreadful consequences, was but the fulfilment of a divine decree



which involved in the guilt and misery thus incurred the whole human race. But God in His free mercy had predestined a certain number out of the mass to salvation, and for these, and these alone, Christ died. The other side urged that Christ died for all ; that the grace purchased by Christ, and necessary to salvation, is offered to all ; that man, being a free agent, is capable of faith and holy desires, even before receiving grace ; and that it rests with himself either to resist the influence of grace when offered, or to comply with its suggestions. From that time to this, the Augustinian theory has throughout the entire Western Church been understood in one or other of these senses. Even within the Church of Rome itself, the Jansenists took one side, the Jesuits another, in this controversy ; and among Protestants, Calvinists and Arminians divided the religious world between them. As to the Eastern Church, it fell in very early with what was called the semi-Pelagian view of these questions, and still in its more important branches adheres to it.

It appears, then, that the “creeds of Christendom” which give offence to one school among our thinkers, and “the scheme of redemption” which excites the indignation of another, have only an indirect connection with Christianity itself, inasmuch as the forms in which they present themselves to us are nothing more than the productions of men, actuated, no doubt, by

the very best intentions, but neither guided in their labours by inspiration, nor pretending to be so guided. That the former enunciate impossible untruths no Christian can admit. That they endeavour to express in words truths by far too sublime to be apprehended except by "the faculty of faith," every candid Christian will allow. Indeed the early Church, as we have just seen, so fully understood this matter, that while affirming and employing them for special purposes, she carefully avoided intruding them as an essential ingredient into the public services of her congregations. With respect to the latter, it has in truth no higher claim upon general acceptance than is furnished by the measure of respect in which we are willing to hold the commentaries of certain eminent yet fallible Christian writers. Now to assail Christianity through such avenues of approach as these, is about as fair as it would be to denounce the social state as a crying evil, because it has in many respects departed from its primitive simplicity. As Churchmen, whether we be Anglicans, Romanists, or Nonconformists, we may feel ourselves bound to acquiesce in whatever interpretation the religious body of which we happen severally to be members shall put upon the language of Holy Scripture. But when the perfect fitness of the Christian religion to the wants of human nature is disputed, we must invite you to examine so grave a question,

not by the light which is shed upon it by the writings of Calvin or Arminius, nor yet through the medium of the three Creeds, nor as it is brought before you in the Westminster Confession of Faith, or in the Thirty-nine Articles, but by turning to the New Testament itself, and gathering from all that is there set down what Christ required His personal followers to believe, and what they in their turn communicated to the converts as His doctrine. You cannot but confess that the code of ethics established by Christ is the most perfect the world ever saw. You must admit that His theory of a future state, and of the preparation necessary to render it a happy one, is in complete accord with the dictates both of reason and experience. And if His resurrection from the dead appear to be inadmissible, it is for you to enunciate some other and better ground on which the certainty may be established of that one article of belief—the belief in a future state of existence, on which, as on a pivot, man's sense of moral responsibility to God, to his neighbour, and to himself, absolutely turns. If you succeed in effecting this great discovery, you will deserve to be placed above all the speculative philosophers with whose writings we are acquainted, not excepting Bishop Berkeley himself, to whom, however, we must be permitted to suspect that you will be indebted for some at least of

your premises. Meanwhile it is surely not impossible for the disciples of M. Rénan, and thinkers of the school to which the author of 'Ecce Homo' belongs, to see equally with ourselves the hand of God, both in the preparations that were made for the coming of Christ, and in the marvellous influence for good which His Gospel has exercised, and continues to exercise, throughout the world. For coincidence of opinion in this respect by no means implies that there shall be perfect unanimity on any subject which admits of being considered from more than one point of view. It is quite possible, for example, to believe in the authenticity and divine authority of the Bible, yet to put aside most of the miraculous stories with which the volume abounds; and on the extent with which the individual is endowed with "the faculty of faith," it must depend whether he shall read all of the sacred records literally as they are written, or discover in some of them sublime truths veiled, yet not hidden, under language which is metaphorical. Nor need any one apprehend that in making these admissions he surrenders one jot of the reverence which is due to the Holy Book, or dims the lustre of his own faith in Him whose earthly career is therein foretold and depicted. There was a time when belief in the divine origin of Christianity was held to be dependent on a belief in the reality of miracles.

No thoughtful Christian would advance such a theory now ; because, whatever the effect of a miracle might be in demonstrating the power of the wonder-worker over physical forces, it could make no such change in the nature of things as to convert truth into falsehood, or falsehood into truth. We who believe in the divine nature and mission of Christ, do so, not because He healed the sick and raised the dead, but because "never man spake like this man," and because only in the revelation which He has made of God's will and man's destiny can be found a rational solution of the doubts and fears and aspirations which, from time immemorial, had distracted the human mind. Where else, indeed, than in Christ's Gospel, have life and immortality been brought to light? On what other evidence than the Gospel supplies can we test the assurance that for us nature's universal law shall be suspended? Nothing can be more certain than that to every living thing, herb, tree, bird, beast, man, one uniform measure is meted out. There is for each growth, maturity, decay, death ; and though in our pride of intellect we may endeavour to convince ourselves that minds such as ours were not created to perish with the perishable body, we are conscious all the while of the shadowy nature of our reasoning, and the hollowness of the foundation on which it rests. But look elsewhere,



and the cloud lifts at once. Christ died—Christ rose again—Christ has destroyed the power of the grave. The great problem is thus solved, and the record of the solution is given in words which are intelligible to all capacities : “ The wages of sin is death ; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

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## ERRATA.

Page 6, line 16, *for* "purposes" *read* "purpose."

Page 25, line 10, *for* "conception" *read* "perception."

Page 73, line 19, *for* "book" *read* "books."

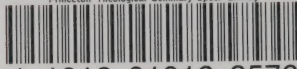








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